The New Criterion

April 1999

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

Notes & Comments, 1
The betrayal of liberalism, VIII
by Robert Kagan, 4
Randall Jarrell's criticism *by Brad Leithauser*, 19
Eça de Queirós *by Alexander Coleman*, 28
Max Beckmann in Paris *by Karen Wilkin*, 37
Three poems by *William Coleman*, 43

Theater: No business like show business *by Mark Steyn*, 46; **Art:** "Dosso Dossi" *by Creighton Gilbert*, 51; **The media:** The women come & go *by James Bowman*, 55; **Fiction chronicle** *by Brooke Allen*, 60
Books: *John Gross, editor* The new Oxford book of English prose *reviewed by Joseph Epstein*, 65; *Timothy Steele* All the fun's in how you say a thing: an explanation of meter and versification *reviewed by Robert Richman*, 70; *David Crane* Lord Byron's jackal *reviewed by Ben Downing*, 72;
Book notes *by Christopher Carduff*, 74; **Notebook:** Repeating the old lies *by Jeffrey Meyers*, 77

Volume 17, Number 8, $4.75

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Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. April 1999, Volume 17, Number 8. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster and subscribers: send change of address, all remittances, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. For subscription problems call (800) 783-4903. Copyright © 1999 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date. **Internet: http://www.newcriterion.com Email: letters@newcriterion.com**

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

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Spring 1999

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Notes & Comments: April 1999

The one unforgivable sin

The controversy surrounding the awarding of an Oscar for lifetime achievement to Elia Kazan this spring has passed. Yet the political mindset that produced this preposterous and sometimes vicious controversy remains, it seems, a permanent feature of our mainstream liberal culture. It is a mindset that still looks upon lying about Communism as a permissible moral choice. By the same token, telling the truth about Communism remains for minds of this persuasion the one unforgivable sin, punishable by public defamation and professional ostracism. The headline for Geoffrey Wheatcroft's article in *The Wall Street Journal* of March 19 gave us a perfect summary of this malign mindset: "He told the truth; They lied for Communism; And he's the bad guy?"

It was to be expected, of course, that such remnants of the paleolithic Left as *The Nation* and *The Village Voice* would indulge in yet another orgy of anti-anti-Communist subterfuge, denial, and mendacity on this occasion, for it is in the nature of the anti-anti-Communist mind to deny even the most horrific facts of history in the name of some allegedly higher political loyalty. As Anne Applebaum observed in these pages in October 1996, in our series on "The Future of the European Past,"

> The fact of the matter was that the founding philosophers of the Western Left were the same as those of the Soviet Union. Some of the language was shared as well: Marx and Engels, the masses, the struggle, the proletariat, the exploiters and exploited, the ownership of the means of production, and more. To condemn the Soviet Union too thoroughly would be to condemn a part of what the Western Left held dear.

What was once an attitude confined to the hard-core Stalinist Left, however, has now passed, unchanged, into the culture of post-Cold War liberalism as an article of faith. If, some fifty years ago, there was a sharply drawn difference to be observed in the ways that *Time* magazine, for example, and *The Nation* responded to revelations of Communist criminality, those differences have now been effectively eradicated. In 1999, *Time* has become indistinguishable from the rest of the Left-liberal media in regarding anti-Communist candor as the one unforgivable sin.

Nowhere has this liberal mindset remained more adamant in its refusal to deal with the harsh realities of the Communist past than in Hollywood. As Anne Applebaum also observed in her contribution to "The Future of the European Past" series,

> Steven Spielberg, probably Hollywood's lead-

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ing director (like it or not) has chosen to make films about Japanese concentration camps (*Empire of the Sun*) and Nazi concentration camps, but not about Stalinist camps.

Hollywood has never given us a Soviet version of *Schindler's List* or *Sophie's Choice*, and never will, for to do so would be to vindicate, by implication, those who had the courage to tell the truth about Communism when it mattered most—when Stalin and his terrorist empire were continuing their slaughter of the innocents.

It was the critic George Steiner who once condemned Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn for committing a "moral indecency" in comparing Lenin to Hitler in *The Gulag Archipelago*, even though the invention of the twentieth-century concentration camp remains a conspicuous feature of Lenin's contribution to modern politics. But it was, of course, Mr. Steiner who committed a moral indecency in his slander of Solzhenitsyn, and it was this same moral indecency that was restaged in the Elia Kazan uproar.

Product placement 101

Our schools may have trouble teaching children to read, write, and calculate effectively, but they seem to be doing a fine job of equipping them for trips to the mall or McDonalds. According to a front-page story in the the March 21 issue of *The New York Times*, many state-funded math textbooks routinely feature "a wide array of brand-name consumer products, from Nike and Gatorade to Disneyland and Topps baseball cards, many of which appeared in illustrations as well." As the story explained, "school districts are seen as prime targets by computer software publishers, fast-food chains, soft-drink bottlers and other corporations, which believe that brand loyalty begins at an early age."

No doubt it does. And what better way to ensure loyalty than to bombard an audience with the names and images of a particular brand. In one sixth-grade math textbook published by McGraw-Hill, students will find a word problem in which "Will is saving his allowance to buy a pair of Nike shoes that cost $68.25." Another problem pauses to inform them that "The best-selling packaged cookie in the world is the Oreo cookie," before proceeding to the matter at hand: "The diameter of an Oreo cookie is 1.75 inches. Express the diameter of an Oreo cookie as a fraction in simplest form."

The McGraw-Hill textbook is intended to turn word problems into real-life situations to better teach the principles of sixth-grade math. It is by no means clear whether students can actually solve the problems tacked on to these commercials. But after a semester of sixth-grade math, they will clearly know all about Nike sneakers, Nabisco cookies, and McDonalds hamburgers. Apparently the publisher received no payments from the companies whose products were featured in the McGraw-Hill textbook. One of the book's co-author's said that products were touted simply to make the math problems more "relevant" to students. But parents are understandably outraged that textbooks have been co-opted as a new outlet for corporate advertising. (They ought to be outraged, too, by such cynical appeals to "relevance"—a term that, whenever it is used in an educational context, ought to be considered guilty until proven innocent.)

As might have been predicted, it turns out that the insinuation of advertising into textbooks is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the corporate effort to turn public schools into training grounds for consumers-to-be. According to an Op-Ed piece by Steven Manning in the *Times* on March 24, Coca-Cola and Pepsi have "turned some schools into virtual sales

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agents for their products. Districts across the country have signed multimillion-dollar 'pouring rights' contracts, which give a soft-drink company exclusive permission to distribute its products in schools." Some schools even have sales quotas to meet in order to receive payments ranging from $5,000 to $25,000 per year.

Of course, this frenzy of hucksterism is taking place against the backdrop of a continued crisis in educational standards. More and more it seems, American schools are giving themselves up to a diet of PC social indoctrination abetted by blatant consumerism. Sixth-graders may know to use condoms after they take off their Nikes; exactly what else they know is a matter of conjecture. As Mr. Manning noted in his editorial, "unless more parents, teachers, and politicians start paying attention, consumerism may replace learning as the predominant value in American public education."

Deviant chic

The New York Times was full of depressing news on March 21. On the front page of the paper's "Style" section was a long story entitled "The Mainstream Flirts With Pornography Chic." It is easy to wonder whether "flirts" is really the right word. Anyone who has been subjected to the underwear advertisements emblazoned on city buses in New York, the fashion ads in women's magazines, or indeed the stories trumpeted on the covers of those magazines might think that something far stronger than "flirts" is called for. It seems to be a rule of contemporary cultural life, however, that things are always worse than one thinks. No sooner have we gotten used to gender-bending pedophilic ads from Calvin Klein than the President of the United States gives the cigar industry a bad name. Now we learn from the *Times* that the sewers of hard-core pornography are eagerly being raided by mainstream television, movies, and art galleries. Porn stars are featured in mainstream productions, the look and feel of low-budget porn films are being copied as the latest thing in chic. In Los Angeles, the *Times* reports, the pornographer Larry Flynt of *Hustler* magazine "opened a blond-wood latte bar in December that also sells a casual assortment of adult videos and sex toys. Hustler Hollywood is the prototype in what Mr. Flynt says will be a national roll-out of Gap-style newsstand sex shops—a new one every ninety days, with next stops in Las Vegas and Atlanta."

The filmmaker John Waters, who made a name for himself directing several semi-pornographic cult films, is quoted as saying that pornography is "the only real outlaw left—that's why it's hip." But of course yesterday's outlaw is today's bestseller. In fact, the rise of "pornography chic" is just the latest reminder that our culture seems determined to normalize the abnormal and perverted. Several years ago, Daniel Patrick Moynihan made headlines with an article called "Defining Deviancy Down." We begin to wonder how far down our culture is prepared to go.

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The betrayal of liberalism: VIII

History repeating itself: liberalism and foreign policy

by Robert Kagan

Just as there has been no genuine alternative to the liberal political tradition in America, as Louis Hartz pointed many years ago, so in foreign policy both the higher principles and the baser urges shaping America's relations with the rest of the world have always been informed by a liberal worldview. Certainly no competing foreign policy tradition, whether one calls it conservative, "realist" or something else, has ever posed a serious challenge. No American statesman has ever conducted international relations without regard to liberal ideological considerations. Even Henry Kissinger, America's high priest of realpolitik, did not in office attempt to fashion a foreign policy in which American liberal principles were somehow excised from a definition of American interests. Kissinger may have tried to make American foreign policy less ideological; he did not attempt the impossible task of making it non-ideological.

Much less did any of Kissinger's historical predecessors believe that such a separation could be made between American interests and American liberal ideals. The eighteenth-century Anglo-American settlers who spread out from the Atlantic littoral carried with them the Enlightenment liberal's convictions that nature was something to be conquered, that land was something to be cultivated and improved, that ownership of property was the cornerstone of human freedom, that progress was possible and desirable, that stubborn human nature could be channeled in beneficial directions, if not "perfected," by the proper political institutions, that civilization—by which they meant Anglo-Saxon civilization—could and should be advanced by the cumulative efforts of individuals seeking their own happiness. The Americans who celebrated the early stages of the French Revolution, which included everyone from Jeffersonian Republicans to such stalwart Federalists as Alexander Hamilton and John Marshall, believed that the well-being of liberalism at home was linked somehow to the fate of liberalism abroad, that the American revolution itself had been fought not only for Americans but also for all men everywhere, and that the day would come when liberalism would be spread around the globe.

These liberal convictions manifested themselves in the making of foreign policy. In the early republic, Washington, Jefferson, and Hamilton in their own ways attempted to implement liberal visions of American empire. The injunctions of the Farewell Address aimed above all at safeguarding the future of such an empire, and Jefferson's proclaimed vision of an "empire of liberty" spoke for itself. Even Hamilton's desire to emulate the greatness of Britain was stimulated to a large extent by his desire to emulate, if not surpass, that example of a great liberal nation wielding vast influence on the world stage. In the early nineteenth century, the Monroe Doctrine contained within it

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not merely the idea of separating the new world from the old—which itself had ideological as well as strategic implications—but also a vision of an American economic and political order in the hemisphere.

The settling of the continent from the eighteenth century onward was an exercise in liberal expansion, driven forward by the aspirations of individuals infused with a Lockean understanding of the world and with a consciousness of manifest destiny that aimed at the conquest of an untamed, barbaric world by liberal civilization. The opening of Far Eastern markets in the 1890s was driven both by liberal acquisitiveness and by faith in the uplifting and civilizing effects of commerce. In the Western Hemisphere, strategic and economic motives intermingled with liberal goals from the 1890s onward. And in the twentieth century, from Theodore Roosevelt, through Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and on into the Cold War and beyond, liberalism, in both its commercial aspects and its world-transforming ideological aspects, was the driving force of American foreign policy.

As a result of the revolution and its enunciation of universal principles, American foreign policy could never be just about America. The universalist credo linked Americans to the rest of the civilized world and gave them a stake in the direction that world took. A world dominated by tyrannies would always look askance at the liberal democratic experiment which by its very nature threatened their existence. The American conviction that all peoples desired freedom, after all, was shared equally by the enemies of liberalism. As Metternich was to ask as the wave of "liberal" revolutions crested in Latin America in the 1820s, "if this flood of evil doctrines and pernicious examples should extend over the whole of America, what would become . . . of the moral force of our governments, and of that conservative system which has saved Europe from complete dissolution?"

Nor did most Americans doubt that other peoples could profit from liberal government as much as the Anglo-Saxon race did. As the eighteenth-century diplomat Joel Barlow declared, "If the Algerines or the Indoos were to shake off the yoke of despotism, and adopt ideas of equal liberty, they would that moment be in a condition to frame a better government for themselves." And even if other Americans were less optimistic than Barlow, and doubted that Catholics, Negroes, Indians, as well as "Indoos," were capable of exercising their rights responsibly, they were nevertheless loathe to claim that the rights they cherished were naturally the exclusive birthright of some but not others. In their state of weakness in the eighteenth and for most of the nineteenth century, Americans could not make the spread of liberty beyond the continent of North America a central or even a very prominent part of their foreign policy. But this did not mean they intended never to do so, or that they did not perceive the spread of liberalism to be fundamentally in America's interests as well as in the interests of all mankind.

But foreign policy liberalism, like political liberalism, has always contained inherent tensions between opposing impulses, some thrusting the nation outward, others imposing limits on that outward thrust. The same elevation of individual over state interests that made the expansion of territory and overseas influence a political imperative for a government devoted to furthering individual happiness could also hinder the conduct of foreign policy when it concerned issues only indirectly and distantly related to material gain and personal security. Lockean man, when he looked at his nation's relations with the rest of the world, had a tendency to ask, where is the benefit to me? Liberalism, therefore, posed a challenge to the consistent conduct of an outward-looking foreign policy even as it served as the driving force behind it.

The day-to-day wielding of power and influence on the world stage might or might not appear to address mundane material interests and so could be a matter of indif-

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ference, or worse, to citizens consumed by their quotidian effort to fulfill Adam Smith's injunction to save a penny and better their condition. The expense of financing military forces, not to mention the expense of sacrificing one's life in the service of foreign policy goals, could appear not only excessive but also violative of liberalism itself—even if those expenses were incurred in pursuit of liberal ends, both material and ideological. In short, Americans wanted what they wanted in the world, and their liberalism both created and justified those wants. But they were not always prepared to pay for what they wanted with blood and treasure, and liberalism both inspired and justified that unwillingness as well.

The moral dimensions of liberalism also cut in two directions. Americans might want to expand their territory and the reach of their power and influence overseas in pursuit of material gain. They might hope, in the process, to transform the world, or at least those parts of it with which they came into contact. But they could not avoid facing the fact that in so doing they were in varying degrees imposing themselves and their morality on others—in the most extreme form by taking their land, in the most subtle form by making them dependent on American commerce. The moral price of liberal expansion was to impinge on the individual autonomy of others, to deny others the right of untrammeled self-determination.

The drama of American foreign policy over the past two centuries, and perhaps the key to understanding the sources of American conduct in the world, can be found in the effort by Americans to find some way of reconciling these tensions and contradictions, not only within liberalism itself but also between liberalism and those abiding characteristics of human nature which Americans shared with the rest of the human race. For indeed, such enduring characteristics of human nature as ambition, the desire for honor, such human emotions as pride, love of clan or country, and hatred and disdain of others were also powerful determinants of American behavior. But they existed uneasily alongside American liberalism. What constituted honorable behavior for a liberal nation? Obviously the answer was different from what it had been for European monarchies or Greek and Roman city-states and empires. What was the relationship between liberalism and nationalism? Did Americans even possess a nationalism that was distinct from liberalism?

And then there was the problem of power. Suspicion of power lay at the heart of American politics and was a main theme of America's revolutionary republican ideology. In theory, at least, American power and American liberalism could on occasion seem to be at odds. In their domestic arrangements, Americans had managed to find ways to balance the daily exercise of power with the preservation of liberalism. But similar arrangements were not available in the international arena, though some Americans dreamed of a day when they would be.

For most of the first century of American history, however, these tensions were submerged. National weakness in a world of aggressive great powers kept many of the foreign policy questions that would later dominate American discourse from forcing themselves on the people and their leaders. It was the rise of the United States to the status of a great power at the end of the nineteenth century—a rise due more to the growing strength of the American economy than to any decision by American statesmen—that exposed the contradictions and exacerbated the tensions that had always been inherent in the American character but which had lain dormant and unexamined as long as the young nation was weak.

The significance of power, and its interaction with the enduring traits of the American character, and especially with American liberalism, has been a surprisingly neglected subject in the historiography of American foreign relations. Even the realists, who ought to be attuned to the impact of growing power on a nation's behavior, have failed to weave the growth of Amer-

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ican power into their analysis of the changing nature of American foreign policy. The founders made no such mistake. In his Farewell Address, Washington anticipated that "the period [was] not far off" when the United States would possess the power and the freedom to "choose peace or war, as our interest guided by our justice shall counsel." Hamilton, Jefferson, and many other leading Americans always assumed that America would become a great world power and that its manner of conducting foreign policy, indeed, the very purposes of American foreign policy, would change in proportion to the influence America was able to wield on the world stage.

The acquisition of great power during the two centuries after independence interacted with the enduring traits in the American character in different but important ways. Growing power, for instance, especially in the latter part of the nineteenth century, fueled already extant ambitions for national greatness. Certainly men like Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge did not invent an American ambition for power, prestige, and even glory; indeed, they self-consciously and quite legitimately drew upon the writings of Hamilton and Washington in making their case for greatness. To be sure, not many American leaders after Roosevelt's time spoke in the blunt language of greatness and glory. For reasons discussed below, the use of such rhetoric actually declined as American power grew. But pride in American power and prestige lurked just beneath the surface of American policies throughout the twentieth century. The notion that the United States was replacing Great Britain as the world's leading power, for instance, or that destiny had placed upon the United States the burden of global responsibilities which had once fallen on the British Empire was shared by policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic. It is hard to imagine that American statesmen did not view this historic development with pride as well as trepidation. The "national egoism" that realists such as Robert Osgood have decried in the actions and rhetoric of Theodore Roosevelt and his cronies long predated and long outlived them.

Growing power, especially growing economic power, also shaped the persistent American search for individual opportunity and material gain. With the growth of American economic power, notions of international free trade considered utopian in the eighteenth century had become by the second half of the twentieth a widely agreed-upon national interest.

Nor did the widespread American desire to see repressed populations liberated, as in Cuba, represent a new departure in America in the last years of the nineteenth century. It was not as if Americans suddenly adopted an "ideological" foreign policy to further their "political, social, and religious beliefs" rather than their national "interests." The liberal, democratic ideals that shaped American policy from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth had always been present in the American character (except perhaps in the antebellum South) and had manifested themselves on many occasions, from the time of the French revolution to the struggles over Greek and Polish independence, to the advent of the French Third Republic in 1870. What was new in the late 1890s was not American idealism but the growing appreciation of American power, including but not limited to the existence of a powerful enough navy to put muscle behind those ideals.

The growth of American power did not only put new force behind already existing goals and ambitions. It also raised new and difficult problems for American foreign policy. A strong United States was compelled to make different calculations about what constituted honorable behavior on the world stage. A strong United States had to confront the gap that necessarily existed between its professed ideals and its conduct of foreign policy. Finally, for a liberal nation heavily shaped by the teachings of Christianity, power itself posed problems that needed to be reconciled if Americans were

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to justify the strength that they had acquired and which they very much wanted to use and enjoy.

It should be axiomatic that what constitutes honorable behavior for a weak nation may often seem dishonorable if practiced by a much stronger nation. During the wars of the French revolution, Americans suffered severe indignities and impingements on their ability to trade freely with the belligerents. This was a blow to their honor, but not an intolerable blow. To suffer indignities at the hands of stronger powers was permissible, if not desirable. More than a century later, however, when another European war imposed similar indignities and similar impingements on America's ability to trade freely, the calculation of what constituted honorable behavior had changed. Conscious of their new power and influence in the world, many leading Americans considered it an affront to the nation's honor to follow the course of pacific toleration proposed by William Jennings Bryan. Put simply, because a powerful United States did not have to tolerate depredations against its trade with Europe, it had become dishonorable to tolerate them.[1] More was involved than narrow judgments about "interest." For an increasingly powerful United States, judgments about honor and interest often merged.

Nor were Americans unusual in this respect. Thucydides made rather a large point about honor being one of the three motives that spur nations to war. Some studies of Winston Churchill's views have emphasized the extent to which his and other British statesmen's attitudes toward the preservation of the British Empire were intimately bound up with questions of honor. But it is also true that for Americans, calculations of honor involved issues more complex than merely the attainment of respect and due regard by others. As a liberal nation, the United States also had its own unique conception of honor which, though usually unspoken, heavily shaped its foreign policy throughout the twentieth century.

Since the very existence of the United States was grounded on liberal principles that Americans assumed to be universal, American foreign policy from the beginning contained within it a tension between ideals and practice. Americans had declared that the principles of individual liberty and equality were the birthright of all men, yet for most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they lived in a world dominated by autocracies with whom they had to maintain respectful and even friendly relations. They might celebrate popular revolutions espousing liberal principles, in France and other parts of Europe, or in Latin America, but they could do little or nothing to aid such popular causes abroad without endangering their own survival. For most of the first fifty years of the republic, therefore, the inherent tension in American foreign policy did not pose a serious problem. The manifest weakness of the United States effectively absolved it of any responsibility to act on its principles if doing so threatened at home the very institutions of liberalism they hoped to preserve.

As American power grew, however, the inherent tension between ideals and practice grew more severe and more troubling. Even as early as the 1820s, the debate between John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay over the proper American response to liberal revolutions in Latin America and in Europe brought this tension to the fore. Adams might declare that the United States was the defender only of her own freedom, but the debate with Clay demonstrated that American unwillingness to use its growing power to assist those struggling for freedom, especially in the Western hemisphere, was coming to appear less honorable to leading Americans. Indeed, for all the attention historians have paid to Adams's famous declaration of American disinterest in the fate of

1 This is not to deny the many other motives that led Americans to war in 1917, but I would argue that considerations of honor were important and perhaps even decisive.

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liberal causes abroad—"does not go abroad in search of monsters to destroy"—Adams's view was more the last gasp of an earlier era of American weakness than a harbinger of a future characterized by American strength.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the growth of American power had made it difficult for American statesmen to explain why the United States should not close the gap between its professed ideals and its actions. The historian William Widenor has described well the view of Henry Cabot Lodge and others in his circle, including Theodore Roosevelt, that America's rise to great power necessarily carried with it certain responsibilities and moral obligations. Whereas in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the main task had been to secure the nation and its character as a democratic republic, by the end of the nineteenth century "the success of that policy could be gauged by whether the United States actually stood for something in world affairs." For Lodge, honor or "securing a proper rank among the nations" meant trying to close the gap between ideals and practice. "[W]hen the U.S. could influence events, as in Cuba, then failure to act was an admission that the country's vaunted morality was only pretense." As Lodge put it, "The continent has been conquered, and now the people's mind is turning to the fact that while we were engaged in this great work other things have been neglected." Honor, power, and America's liberal ideals had, in short, become intimately connected.

The conviction that increasing American power imposed an increasing obligation to support where possible the democratic aspirations of others, and that not to do so was a dishonorable betrayal of American ideals, was an important factor shaping American foreign policy throughout the twentieth century. This did not mean that the United States was always true to its principles or that it did not either ignore or sometimes even connive in the suppression of democratic forces abroad. But it did mean that such behavior was usually attended by a guilty conscience and by a sense that it was, indeed, dishonorable for a great democratic nation to assume a disinterested posture while others who professed liberal principles were crushed by tyrants. Pressure to make practice conform more closely to ideals grew as American power grew and as the United States became more engaged in the world.

Historians have erred in depicting the increased American concern for liberal principles and democratic movements abroad in the twentieth century as a sharp departure from an allegedly non-ideological, "realistic" foreign policy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It may be equally misleading to view the shift in American priorities as merely a rejuvenation of a long-dormant American "mission." It is less the case that Americans suddenly set out to transform the world than that their consciousness of great power at the end of the nineteenth century inevitably forced them to consider the moral implications of possessing such power.

For a nation committed to liberal principles, which included the rights of all peoples to live free from coercion, and which therefore placed a premium on self-determination, the exercise of great power was fraught with moral complexity. The United States had itself been born in an act of national self-determination, throwing off the yoke of an imperial master. But a little over a century later, it was the United States that wielded power, coercing other, weaker nations, and exercising an increasing hegemony in the Western hemisphere, especially in the Caribbean basin. This turn to hegemony was not a choice, moreover, but an inescapable fact of life: To be the most powerful nation among a group of weaker nations was to be hegemonic and to exert powerful influence over others. Yet this reality of power raised a problem for a liberal democracy.

That problem was compounded by the fact that the United States was also a nation of Christians (though it was not a Christian

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nation), and the wielding of great power was by nature contrary to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. The great Christian powers of earlier centuries had reconciled this problem by claiming to employ their power for the advancement of Christianity itself, as an instrument of divine will. But this course was not available to a nation built on a fundamentally modern, nonsectarian foundation. American presidents, unlike European monarchs, did not derive their authority from divine right. Nor could a modern, liberal, and nonsectarian nation claim that a goal of its foreign policy was to bring Christianity to heathen populations. America's rise to great power came at a time when the Western world no longer accepted religious justifications for the exercise of power.

Americans, therefore, had to provide new answers to old questions: How to wield power without being un-Christian? How to impose one's will, as powerful nations must do, without violating the tenets of liberalism, which included the right of self-determination? How to employ power honorably, when the American definition of honor could not be Greek or Roman or, indeed, even Christian, but modern and liberal? One answer, the relinquishment of power, was not seriously considered by most Americans. They enjoyed the material benefits that came from power and the opportunities it opened for their individual enrichment. They sought the greater security that the exercise of power made possible. They appreciated the international respect that came with power and influence. And, like other nations, they enjoyed possessing power for its own sake. But, like other nations, too, they needed to justify the exercise of power in terms that had meaning for the kind of people they were.

Another solution to the conundrum was simply denial. Americans wanted to reassure themselves, perhaps even more than they wanted to reassure others, that they did not seek to wield power as other great nations had wielded it in the past. Their natural approach to the world was one of isolation and repose, not expansion. They had no grand ambitions in the world but wanted only to be left alone. They did not seek national greatness, only justice. They would not use power to influence others to conform to American desires but only to defend themselves against encroachments on their legitimate, defensive interests. As American power grew throughout the twentieth century so, too, did the self-abnegating rhetoric about American aims in the world. The "egoistic" rhetoric of power, greatness, glory, and honor which was used so freely by the founders and later, briefly, by Theodore Roosevelt and his ilk, diminished in proportion to the rise of American power. The more it became clear that America was emerging as the world's most powerful and influential nation, with ambitions to match, the more this had to be denied in American public rhetoric.[2] This denial, in fact, became the core of the traditional narrative of the history of American foreign policy, which depicted Americans as amassing great power without actually seeking it and wielding great power only when external threats compelled them to do so.

But denial had its limits. The myth of a passive, isolationist America was repeatedly exploded by the reality of expanding influence, growing power, and an ever more encompassing global hegemony. The wielding of great power still required an honorable and principled justification that con-

2 This argument is, of course, similar to that made by Kennan and other realists, who criticized Americans' unwillingness to accept the hard realities of power in the twentieth century. Where I differ from the realists, however, is in tracing the origins of this behavior. Whereas the realists suggest that the moralism and legalism of twentieth-century Americans were the products of an American predisposition to irrational utopianism, divorced from considerations of power, I argue that, to the contrary, they were an understandable response to the problem of power itself, a problem that other great powers in history had also had to confront and resolve in their own way.

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formed to the American character. Americans, therefore, tried to resolve the moral conundrum of power in two ways. First, they proposed to use that power to serve liberal ends, much as the earlier Christian great powers had claimed to use their power to serve Christian ends. Second, they attempted to construct an international system—whether in the form of a concert of great powers, the League of Nations, the United Nations, or the NATO alliance—in which the wielding of American power could receive the blessing of other nations and could be depicted as advancing not only, or even primarily, the narrow interests of Americans but the broader goals of an international community of civilized states.

The experience of the Civil War had an enormous impact on Americans' thinking about the relationship between rights and responsibilities. Although the North fought initially for the preservation of the Union and in defense of northern rights and liberties, over the course of the war the purposes and rationale shifted. By the end, many Americans, following Lincoln's lead, had come to the conviction that it was not enough to preserve one's own rights within a national system that denied those rights to others. Indeed, for many the painful lesson of the antebellum years was that disinterest in the preservation of American liberties in the South had come to threaten those liberties everywhere. It was not enough to have a society based on rights if those rights could not be exercised by all the people. Such inconsistency was dishonorable as well as pernicious. At the end of the war and through the period of reconstruction, therefore, most leading northerners, which is to say most Republicans, came to embrace a positive responsibility to defend liberties throughout the nation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the generation of leaders that included Roosevelt and Lodge, both of whom looked upon the Civil War as America's finest moment and upon the Republican party as the great moral force of the nation, carried that sense of responsibility into foreign affairs.

The central transitional figure in introducing the idea of responsibility into American foreign policy was not Woodrow Wilson but Theodore Roosevelt—a president long admired by realists for his keen grasp of power politics. But Roosevelt's understanding of the importance of power led him in a direction that realists, to the degree they understood it, ought to have found troubling. For it was Roosevelt who first offered an answer to the moral conundrum of power and who launched the United States on its twentieth-century project to reconcile power, honor, and liberalism.

Roosevelt believed that the United States, having acquired great power, had also acquired with it a great international responsibility to help advance the cause of civilization. This meant, in the first instance, creating a liberal order in the Western hemisphere, just as the other great civilized powers had the responsibility of bringing about order in their spheres of influence. Because of its power, Roosevelt believed, the United States had no choice but to "assume an attitude of protection and regulation in regard to all these little states." And because the United States was a democratic great power, protection and regulation also meant helping them acquire the "capacity for self-government," to assist their progress "up out of the discord and turmoil of continual revolution into a general public sense of justice and determination to maintain order."

Throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Caribbean served as an early laboratory for the exercise of American hegemony in pursuit of liberal ends. As it was to do in various parts of the world in the latter half of the century, the United States brokered non-aggression pacts among the Central American states, tried to impose the principle of non-recognition against those leaders who seized power illegitimately, and generally sought to promote democratic government in often hopeless circumstances. More was at work here than idealism. As would be true later in

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the century and in different parts of the world, efforts to further a liberal order sometimes came after interventions undertaken for very different purposes—to protect American investments, for instance, or to defend against perceived threats to American security and hegemony. The furtherance of liberal goals in these cases provided *ex post facto* justification for the wielding of power on less idealistic grounds. But this did not mean that American policymakers were cynics or hypocrites. The United States may not have sent troops to Nicaragua to establish democratic government, for instance, but once in Nicaragua Americans like Henry Stimson, following the Rooseveltian tradition, believed passionately that they had a duty to leave a democratic government behind when they left.

The effort to make the exercise of power conform to the requirements of a liberal conscience shaped American foreign policy throughout the twentieth century, first in the Western hemisphere, later in Europe and Asia—and, as the democratic revolution which swept the globe between 1975 and 1992 revealed, with rather surprising success. John Lewis Gaddis has noted that "The American empire, like other empires in history, brought about profound changes in countries that came into contact with it." But that depiction of the United States as a passive carrier of the liberal virus, though accurate, is also incomplete. Americans may not have set out on a "mission" to make the world democratic, but when the exercise of power brought them unavoidably into contact with other nations, American policymakers often felt compelled to pursue liberal ends. Years before Woodrow Wilson promised to make the world safe for democracy, Roosevelt declared it America's "duty toward the people living in barbarism to see that they are freed from their chains, and we can free them only by destroying barbarism itself."

Nor did Wilson invent the view that the use of American power, for whatever purpose, could best be justified as serving the broader interests of an international community of civilized states. The idea of an international league to enforce peace and defend civilization had germinated in Republican circles long before Wilson campaigned for U.S. membership in the League of Nations. In the 1890s William McKinley's Secretary of State, John Hay, had entertained hopes of bringing the world's great powers together in what Henry Adams called a "combine" of the civilized states. Hay's friend Henry Cabot Lodge saw the U.S. acting in concert with other great powers as a necessary step toward a more peaceful, liberal international order, and William Howard Taft was co-founder of the League to Enforce Peace in 1915. Inherent in all these conceptions was the idea that the interests of Americans were intimately bound with the interests of other peoples in the civilized world, and that parochial and selfish interests, while legitimate, would have to be pursued in the context of this more cosmopolitan understanding.

The idea that the United States might make league with other great powers to advance the cause of an ordered, peaceful, and progressive civilization was conceived most clearly in the mind of Theodore Roosevelt. For Roosevelt, according to the historian Frank Ninkovich, "America's greatness in the coming centuries would be determined largely by the degree to which it contributed to sustaining the forward momentum of Anglo-Saxon culture, which [he] placed at the cutting edge of history." And to make such a contribution required that the distinction between American interests and the interests of civilization be blurred, though not erased. Narrow, selfish interests had to be supplemented, if not subsumed, by a more enlightened definition of self-interest—one that encompassed the interests of civilized humanity. For Roosevelt, this meant that even the most hallowed of traditional American national interests, the Monroe Doctrine, had to be justified not only by historical precedent and by the needs of the nation, but also as serving "the

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true interests of Western civilization." American interventions in the Caribbean had to be understood not as the acts of a hegemon, free to do as it liked with its power, but as an exercise of an "international police power." Roosevelt, as Ninkovich notes, sought nothing less than "the reconciliation of American and global destinies."

This Rooseveltian solution was the supreme attempt to reconcile the tensions within American liberalism, and between liberalism and the natural human desires for power and honor. Paradoxically, the most important element of Roosevelt's appeal for an internationalist foreign policy lay in his appeal to nationalism. It was a nationalism, however, of a uniquely American variety, not an insular, blood-and-soil nationalism, but one that derived its meaning and coherence only from its being rooted in universal liberal principles. Roosevelt wanted Americans to share his pride in the special role their country had to play on the world stage and for which they were uniquely suited as the exemplars of Western liberalism, a role as leader of the onward progress of civilization. Roosevelt's project was to build American foreign policy on this seeming oxymoron, a nationalist internationalism that linked America's fate with that of the rest of the civilized world. For Roosevelt, there was no paradox: American nationalism was in its essence internationalist.

By appealing to American pride and honor in this way, and to the American belief in the universality of liberal principles, Roosevelt hoped to overwhelm and suppress those elements of liberalism which had historically tended to hinder America from achieving what he and his colleagues and disciples viewed as its great destiny. Roosevelt and Lodge had always held in contempt the purely commercial aspects of liberalism, the insistence by so many American businessmen that the chief purpose of foreign policy was to expand trading opportunities for American merchants. Roosevelt constantly feared that Americans would become "isolated from the struggles of the rest of the world, and so immersed in our material prosperity, so that we shall become genuinely effete." He sought to trump the love of commerce with the love of country, with the desire for honor, which meant the assumption of responsibility, and by inspiring Americans to the grander task of advancing civilization.

Roosevelt had equal contempt for the utopian idealists so prevalent in his time and who have risen to shape the national debate on so many occasions since, those who believed the international environment could be so transformed as to rid the world of war, put an end to international conflict and, indeed, put an end to the nation itself. Roosevelt's idealism was "an idealism without a utopia." The Rooseveltian solution did not attempt to wish away the realities of power, but on the contrary rested on the exercise of power by the defenders of civilization against its opponents. "Warlike intervention by the civilized powers," he insisted, "would contribute directly to the peace of the world." Nor could Roosevelt hold with those who believed that the world was naturally progressing toward a more civilized future, irrespective of the actions of the United States. Destiny was to be made, not waited upon.

Neither, however, was Roosevelt's understanding of power a realist understanding. Much as the realists have tried to claim him as their own, Roosevelt did not worship at the shrine of the balance of power. After the outbreak of World War I, Roosevelt favored American intervention on grounds that had little to do with narrow considerations of realpolitik. "[L]ong before a collapse of the balance of power was threatened by the total triumph of one of the coalitions," Ninkovich notes, "or even before it became clear that American interests would be severely harmed by submarine warfare, Roosevelt took his interventionist stand in response to an issue that disturbed many cosmopolitan sensibilities: the German invasion and brutalization of Belgium." Germany's behavior had made it

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the enemy of civilization. The war, Roosevelt declared, was "in its essence one between militarism and democracy." Roosevelt's vision was not of perfect peace and the obsolescence of power, but neither was it devoid of idealism about the prospects for human perfectability. Roosevelt's foreign policy was liberal, but it was an armed liberalism, ready and willing to meet force with force when the onward progress of civilization was challenged, as he believed it inevitably would be.

The Rooseveltian solution provided the broad outlines of the foreign policy the United States would follow, with some notable and catastrophic exceptions, for the remainder of the twentieth century. Indeed, the story of the past hundred years is in some respects the story of Americans gradually internalizing this broader view of their interests, increasingly equating the national interest with the preservation of the liberal international order. And, much to the surprise of many, Americans also hewed closely to Roosevelt's conception of an armed liberalism. The brief retreat from the "Rooseveltian solution" in the 1920s and 1930s, followed as it was by the horrors of World War II and the quick initiation of the Cold War, only served in the end to strengthen American commitment to the idea that preserving the liberal international order was a goal worth seeking even at the expense of some other, more narrowly defined interests, even if it meant foregoing short-term opportunities for material advancement, and even if it meant spending significant portions of the national wealth on the military and sending Americans to die in conflicts that were not directly related to the immediate security and economic well-being of the homeland. Some leading Americans at the beginning of the century, and a much greater number after World War II, came to regard the preservation of a liberal international order, for all its seeming abstraction, as a profound national interest, of greater importance to America's long-term well-being than the more tangible interests which it subsumed.

Twentieth-century Americans remained as selfish and as self-interested as other peoples. They wielded their power much as other great powers in the past had wielded theirs, and for many of the same purposes. The need to reconcile this behavior with their liberal principles, however, led Americans to a truly novel conception of what constituted their national interest, one that looked beyond traditional national interests to the broader interests of "civilization," one that favored practical idealism over mere practicality. Continuing the Rooseveltian tradition were such men as Stimson, Elihu Root and, though with characteristic inconstancy, Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose formula for the post-World War II world was ultimately less Wilsonian in design and more, well, Rooseveltian. FDR's version of the League of Nations, after all, had at its core a concert of great powers comprising the all-important institution of the Security Council. During the Cold War, the tradition was preserved and extended most notably by that quintessential practical idealist, Dean Acheson, and by his friend and pupil, Harry Truman. And the man most clearly their descendant in this respect was Ronald Reagan. These men, too, were believers in armed liberalism. They, too, sought American support for the grand effort to rebuild and strengthen the liberal international order by appealing to the American nationalist conviction that the fate of liberalism at home was inseparable from the fate of liberalism abroad.

Indeed, for men like Acheson, this was no abstraction. Especially during the early years of the Cold War, they feared that in the absence of a liberal international order, in a world where the law of the jungle prevailed, the United States would be compelled to change its character. An America wielding its power in such a world would have a difficult time remaining a liberal power, both in its behavior abroad and in its domestic institutions.

The American attempt in the twentieth century to build and sustain a liberal inter-

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national order was not, as some realists have argued, an inherently utopian effort that set aside national interests in the service of global do-goodism. The attempt to reconcile American interests and the broader interests of an international community of civilized states was never intended, by Theodore Roosevelt or by most of his successors, as an exercise in self-abnegation. Neither in Roosevelt's day nor in the century to follow did most Americans believe that the liberal international order they sought to build and uphold would in any significant way impinge on their right or their ability to pursue their own interests and ambitions on the world stage. To the contrary, the liberal order they sought was designed to allow Americans to pursue the full panoply of their "interests," both of the material kind emphasized by realists and revisionists, including security and economic opportunity, and the less tangible but nevertheless important American desires for honor, ambition, and the spread of liberalism.

The spread of "civilization" and with it a more open economic order based on free trade and capitalism would provide even greater opportunities for individual material gain. The creation of a league of civilized states would offer greater guarantees for American security, and at the least cost to American citizens, since American partners in the grand global coalition would shoulder their own responsibility for civilizing and policing parts of the world where American power was lacking. Such a world would, by definition, permit the flourishing of democratic and liberal ideals across ever-greater expanses of the globe, as civilization conquered barbarism. It would permit Americans to seek greatness of the most palatable kind, not as an un-Christian and un-liberal lust for nationalist glory but as an agent of civilization's onward progress. And, not least, it would provide a solution to the Americans' problem with power itself, by allowing them to wield power in a manner that was at once honorable and least in conflict with their liberal principles.

Nor did Americans in the Rooseveltian tradition generally insist upon a perfect marriage of principle and power, or expect the liberal international order itself to emerge on its own as a glittering utopia. Throughout most of the twentieth century, American leaders and policy-makers followed more or less faithfully the dictates of practical idealism. With some notable exceptions, Americans generally responded realistically to the obstacles that lay in their path. When other great powers, like Germany and Japan, and later the Soviet Union, whom they hoped or expected would help shoulder the burden of advancing liberal civilization, proved instead to be bent on its destruction, Americans marshaled their forces to fight them through traditional great-power means. When, after World War II, their British and French partners proved too weak to rely upon in the hoped-for concert of great powers, Americans increased their own strength and assumed a vastly disproportionate share of the burden of upholding the liberal order against the single greatest threat to it, the Soviet Union.

Far from being irrational or utopian, America's practical idealism proved a surprisingly effective foreign policy for securing both of its seemingly contradictory aims, managing somehow to advance American interests while also advancing the interests of a broad segment of humanity. And perhaps herein lies the principal explanation for why the United States has been such a successful world power in the twentieth century and why it today enjoys an unprecedented and as yet unchallenged global hegemony.

Whether it will continue to do so remains to be seen. From the beginning the challenges to the Rooseveltian solution have come from all sides, including from within the Rooseveltian tradition itself. Lodge, who favored a league of nations long before Wilson tried to put one into practice, helped defeat it and, with the coming of the Republican ascendancy in the 1920s and

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1930s, opened a path to precisely the kind of commercialism and international abstention which Roosevelt, and Lodge himself, had abhorred. The liberal dream that commerce alone could secure both American interests and American ideals around the world, that commerce alone was an agent of global transformation, a conqueror of war, and a destroyer of the barriers between nations—these, even more than any genuine isolationism, were the ideas that dominated during the 1920s and 1930s, in both Europe and the United States. And since the end of the Cold War this faith in unarmed liberalism which so stirred the eighteenth-century physiocrats and the nineteenth-century Manchester liberals has returned again to dominate the thinking of a surprising number of conservatives and liberals alike, who see commerce as the solution to all problems, from a rising China to a falling Russia.

But it is the tradition of Wilsonian internationalism that has posed the most consistent and pervasive challenge to the Rooseveltian solution, and especially over the past quarter-century. The distinction between these two brands of internationalism has often been lost on most observers of American foreign policy, and for understandable reasons. Both chronologically and substantively, the Wilsonian tradition built on foundations erected by Roosevelt. Wilson, too, aimed to reconcile America's power with its liberal principles. Wilson, too, asked Americans to take a more enlightened view of their national interests and to equate those interests with those of a liberal community of nations. Wilson's policies in the Western Hemisphere differed little from those of Roosevelt's: Where Roosevelt spoke of helping Caribbean peoples acquire the "capacity for self-government," Wilson spoke of teaching Latins to "elect good men." His interventions in Mexico and Haiti were not qualitatively different from Roosevelt's interventions in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

But the differences between Wilsonian internationalism and Rooseveltian internationalism were, in the end, far more important than their similarities. Both at a theoretical and at a practical level, Wilson's internationalism aimed not merely at the reconciliation of power and liberalism but ultimately at the triumph of liberalism over power. Where Roosevelt and his followers believed they had discovered the formula for reconciling American liberalism with the enduring reality of power, and hoped that power could be used in the service of advancing liberalism, Wilson saw this reconciliation as a mere way-station on the road to a future where power would no longer be an instrument of international competition, at all. Wilson foresaw a day when liberalism would no longer have to be an armed liberalism. Unlike Roosevelt's grand idealistic vision, Wilson's idealism was an idealism *with* utopia.

Wilson's means of accomplishing that utopian vision, moreover, required a rejection of the core element of the Rooseveltian solution. For Wilson saw all too plainly that the enemy of the international utopia he sought was the nation itself. Unlike Roosevelt's internationalism, which derived both its strength and its principles from American nationalism, the Wilsonian view regarded nationalism as the ultimate source of war and aggression. Roosevelt had sought to channel those enduring attributes of human nature that Americans shared with all other peoples—pride, ambition, egoism, the search for honor, the appreciation of power—into a responsible internationalism. Indeed, Roosevelt saw no conflict between American national ambition and a moral, internationalist foreign policy. Wilsonian internationalism, on the other hand, sought to negate and to transcend these attributes of human nature. And unlike Roosevelt, who aimed only to subsume the pursuit of America's parochial national interests within a broader and more cosmopolitan understanding of enlightened self-interest that linked "American and global destinies," Wilson's internationalism aimed to do away with the concept of na-

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tional interests altogether. Talk of national interest, and even of the American national interest, was in the Wilsonian view atavistic. Wilson's goal was a de-nationalized internationalism.

Although Wilson's rhetoric before, during, and after World War I found its theoretical basis in a Kantian intellectual tradition, it also had origins that were distinctly political. Wilson was neither anti-American nor a consistent opponent of the use of power. As president he was, if anything, an amasser of executive power and no stranger to the use of American military strength abroad. Still, at the core of his foreign policy lay a suspicion of power, including American power, inherited from a decades-long Democratic tradition to which he was heir.

American participation in World War I presented a daunting challenge to this Democratic tradition. This southern-dominated party's view of the Civil War and reconstruction was, needless to say, rather different from that of the Rooseveltian Republicans. And as a beleaguered opposition party for the better part of two decades, the Democrats had done what opposition parties usually do: oppose. They had opposed not only the power exercised by Republicans around the turn of the century, but also the various rationales which Republicans had offered as justification for the use of power. To Republican appeals to nationalism and celebration of armed liberalism, Democrats had responded with their own appeals to utopian internationalism and liberal pacifism.

When in 1912 these Democrats came to power, in all senses of that phrase, they remained trapped in their opposition rhetoric. Wilson's party was still, after all, the party of Bryan, in which pacifists and anti-imperialists had united to oppose American policy at the turn of the century for its unjust oppression of other peoples' right to self-determination. Wilson had to justify American entry into the war in the only terms that could be acceptable to early twentieth century Democrats and to anti-imperialists of both parties who, after all, thought they had re-elected Wilson in 1916 to keep them out of the European war.

Under the circumstances, it is little wonder that Wilson had to justify American entry into the war, paradoxically, on pacifist grounds. Nor is it surprising that he tried to defend alliance with the European imperial powers on anti-imperialist and, indeed, on anti-nationalist grounds. How else was the party of Bryan, once in office, to exercise power in the world? For these reasons, alone, Wilsonian internationalism had to be very different from the kind of internationalism proposed by Roosevelt.

History does repeat itself, and sometimes with surprising faithfulness to detail. Fifty years after Wilsonian internationalism seemingly destroyed itself on the rocks of the League of Nations treaty ratification debate, it began its re-emergence in the Vietnamized Democratic Party. The transformation progressed by similar stages. The main difference was that before 1968 the Democratic Party had generally embraced Rooseveltian internationalism to put force behind its liberal idealism, appealing to national pride, and of course fear of Communism, as a spur to responsible internationalism. But as a result of the Vietnam debacle, after 1968 and throughout the 1970s the Democratic Party became once again the party of Bryan, this time masquerading as the party of McGovern. The same suspicion of power, and specifically American power, gave birth to the same utopian pacifism. The same liberal trepidation about trampling on the self-determination of foreign peoples led to the same desires to negate power altogether, and with it American pride, ambition, and honor, which were once again seen as evil and atavistic.

Added to the mix this time, however, was a more genuine and explicit anti-Americanism. For now the peoples who needed to be rescued from American power were not poor Filipinos led by the freedom-fighting Aguinaldo, struggling in their own way to achieve both independence and, they claimed, liberal government, but the Viet

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Cong, the Khmer Rouge, the Sandinistas, and other Communist movements the world over—all of whom were self-proclaimed opponents of liberalism itself. In the hands of McGovern Democrats in the 1970s, liberal principles were now to be placed in the service of liberalism's most deadly enemies. Liberal hatred of the exercise of American power slid all too easily into hatred of American liberalism itself. Wilson, it is fair to say, would have been shocked by this turn of events, but he could not honestly disown the intellectual tradition which produced it.

The final stage of re-emergent Wilsonianism came with the election of Bill Clinton and the end of twenty-four years of Republican ascendancy.[3] The election of 1992 raised the same question as the election of 1912. How was the party of McGovern to exercise power in the world? The answer, not surprisingly, was more Wilsonian than Rooseveltian. For the past seven years, Clinton and his advisers have tried to overcome the legacy of the past twenty-five years. In some respects, they have had an easier time of it than Wilson, for they at least have the earlier legacy of Truman and Acheson to guide them. And it is too simple to say that where Clinton and his team have gone wrong, it has only been a consequence of their Wilsonian approach to the world. There are, after all, many ways to fail in foreign policy.

Still, the Clinton administration's evident discomfort with the use of power, even on behalf of idealistic goals, its stated preference for international action over effective American action, its inarticulateness when it comes to discussing national interests, its inability to explain to the American people how their parochial national interests are linked to the international interests of the civilized world, its unwillingness to appeal to American national pride, and much less to the more exalted conception of national honor—all these failures can be traced to the Wilsonian brand of internationalism, which can never quite escape its core conviction that both nation and power are dirty words.

The answer to this new Wilsonianism is not foreign policy realism, with its impossible demand for a de-ideologization of American foreign policy. Realists are in their own way both as utopian and as anti-nationalistic as the Wilsonians they abhor. What could be more unrealistic than to demand of America that it cease behaving as a liberal great power and adopt instead the foreign policy of Metternich's Austria or Bismarck's Germany? Realists do not seem to understand, or do not wish to understand, that the American national interest, its *raison d'état*, can no more be divorced from American liberalism than could the *raison d'état* of the monarchical states be divorced from the interests of the monarchs. The realists would have Americans pursue their "national interest" but at the expense of their national identity. Even if this course could be followed, it would, at least as much as the Wilsonian project, be a very serious betrayal of liberalism, indeed.

Realists are at their best when they point to the limits of what can be achieved in the real world. But in the real world, America's liberalism is as much a fact of life as the enduring reality of power and the immutable character of human nature. It is the messy and inevitably imperfect attempt to reconcile these conflicting realities that provides the great challenge for American statesmanship, now as in the past. It is trite to point out that the task is not an easy one. Practical idealism, idealism without utopia, nationalist internationalism, armed liberalism—these may all appear as logical impossibilities. Perhaps all we can do is note, with appropriate awe and astonishment, just how successfully the United States has accomplished the impossible.

3 Jimmy Carter, it might be said, was to the Republican ascendancy of the late twentieth century what Grover Cleveland was to the Republican ascendancy of the late nineteenth century.

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"No other book": Randall Jarrell's criticism

by Brad Leithauser

Randall Jarrell once wrote, in praise of William Carlos Williams, "When you have read *Paterson* you know for the rest of your life what it is like to be a waterfall." Yet there's another way to ascertain what it is to be a phenomenon that flows, coruscates, sings, and revitalizes: you might turn to the essays of Jarrell himself. Thirty-four years after his untimely death, at the age of fifty-one, he remains a bright, propulsive presence. A powerfully attractive personality—witty, affectionate, energetic, and positively brilliant—emerges in his letters; in his beautiful, piercing poems; in assorted memoirs and a biography; in his photographs (the camera loved his spirited brown eyes and lanky torso); in his comic novel, *Pictures from an Institution,* and his four children's books; and in the various recordings he left behind, in which the voice breaks boyishly and sounds, oddly, appealingly, just a little rubelike. But if your goal is to discover what it was like, day by day, to be a literary waterfall of a man, it is the essays to which you will most profitably turn.

Collectively, the four volumes of Jarrell's critical prose—*Poetry and the Age* (1953), *A Sad Heart at the Supermarket* (1962), and the two posthumous volumes, *The Third Book of Criticism* (1969) and *Kipling, Auden & Co.* (1980)—assemble an ample and vivid portrait. "When you know Frost's poems, you know surprisingly well what the world seemed to one man," Jarrell remarked, and much the same could be said of him and his own essays, even though these divulge precious little autobiography. A reader combs them mostly in vain for hints about Jarrell's upbringing (he was raised largely by his mother, in Nashville, to which she moved him from Long Beach, California, after divorcing a husband who ran a small photography studio); his romantic life (he was married twice); his physical health (mostly good—he was an avid tennis player); or his mental health (again mostly good, it would appear, although in the last year-and-a-half of his life he suffered a catastrophic breakdown).

All the same, you come away from his critical prose feeling that "you know surprisingly well what the world seemed to one man," for the essays convince you that the personal background of this particular man's life is a secondary concern. What is paramount are the rewards and challenges of literature. Once you've read him on Whitman or Kafka you seem to know an intimate, key component of his personality. Which is to say, you know what he felt about Whitman or Kafka, and what could be (his essays tacitly ask) more central and revealing than that?

As a critic, Jarrell thrived during an era when American literary criticism, particularly of poetry, was itself thriving. With characteristic generosity, he extolled his competition: "I do not believe there has been another age in which so much extraordinarily good criticism of poetry has

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been written. . . . I have been speaking of such critics as William Empson, T. S. Eliot, R. P. Blackmur, Allen Tate, Yvor Winters, John Crowe Ransom, I. A. Richards, Morton Dauwen Zabel, Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, Delmore Schwartz, and five or six others."

It's striking, after more than half a century, how many of these remain names to reckon with. But whatever their virtues, few if any of these figures engage us as Jarrell does. Ransom is a case in point. In addition to being a bizarre and wonderful poet, he was a thoughtful and illuminating essayist, and yet the same air of dusty academic discourse which so enriched the poems (enhancing, by means of contrast, the tender sentiments at their core) nearly suffocates the essays. It's easy to esteem, and difficult to love, Ransom's critical prose.

The reader connects with Jarrell's criticism immediately, emotionally. He lures us in with his eloquent, epigrammatic aplomb ("If we judge by wealth and power, our times are the best of times; if the times have made us willing to judge by wealth and power, they are the worst of times"). With his breezy wisecracks ("The people who live in a Golden Age usually go around complaining how yellow everything looks"). With his loopy hypotheticals ("If I had to pick one writer to invent a conversation between an animal, a god, and a machine, it would be Kipling"). With his swooping range of references. His becoming humility. His psychoanalytic penetration. But what was perhaps Jarrell's most compelling trait was the passion he managed to evince, and to enkindle. He claimed that "Malraux writes a passage of ordinary exposition so that we breathe irregularly and jerk our heads from side to side, like spectators at a tennis match"—a pitch of excitement likewise quickening nearly every page of Jarrell's own criticism.

The result is that you can wind up longing to read not the actual book under examination but the ideal version located in Jarrell's head. I adore Christina Stead's *The Man Who Loved Children*, but better still, more harrowing and haunting, is that same novel as it's painstakingly dissected and reassembled in the longest essay Jarrell ever wrote (it runs to forty-eight pages in *The Third Book of Criticism*). Hence, only the purest of heart will not experience, in addition to admiration, some measure of envy and self-reproach when reading Jarrell. How can you help envying someone who can extract so much from so little, as when he focuses in upon an eight-line poem like Housman's "It nods and curtseys and recovers"? Elizabeth Bishop once said of him, "He always seemed more alive than other people, as if constantly tuned up to the concert pitch that most people, including poets, can maintain only for short and fortunate stretches." He's someone who regularly prises more from a line of verse than the rest of us can smell in it and see in it and hear in it.

His multiple and eclectic virtues—originality, erudition, wit, probity, and an irresistible passion—combined to make him the best American poet-critic since Eliot. Or one could call him, after granting Eliot the English citizenship he so actively embraced, the best poet-critic we have ever had. Whichever side of the Atlantic one chooses to place Eliot, Jarrell was his superior in at least one significant respect. He captured a world that any contemporary poet will recognize as "the poetry scene"; his *Poetry and the Age* might even now be retitled *Poetry and Our Age*.

I have a brother-in-law who was a Vice President in the Controls Advisory Service of an investment bank—a job which kept a secure roof over his head, but what in hell is a Vice President in Controls Advisory Services? In a world of increasingly abstruse employment, we can only be grateful to any writer, of fiction or nonfiction, who opens up to us some specialized field—the world of the laser surgeon, the ergonomist, the demographer, the talent-scout for a talk-show host. In this regard—the domain of obscure professions—Jarrell takes the lay-reader further into the life of the modern

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American poet than any other writer I know.

In essays like "Poetry and the Age" and "The Obscurity of the Poet," Jarrell captures what it is to be an artist in a squeeze—caught between the universities which, while providing a livelihood, can show condescension or even hostility to the poet, and the larger, television-centered culture, which is not so much hostile as simply oblivious; this is a society (as Jarrell acerbically noted) that would grant the poet a grant if it knew of his existence. Such essays go on illuminating the lot of the contemporary poet, helping us to read not only Berryman and Roethke and Allen Tate but closer contemporaries like James Merrill and Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott and Amy Clampitt.

By contrast, the essays of Eliot (whom Jarrell revered—the "best poetry critic of our time") are more remote from us than, chronologically speaking, we'd expect them to be. In their cool, Olympian fastidiousness, they can feel miles away from the environs of the contemporary American poet. (Eliot deliberately cultivated this remove, of course. It's characteristic of him, in a preface written in 1961, to wrap quotation marks around the word paperback. Having spent decades in the publishing business, he nonetheless courted the image of a man who has just now placed his first shockingly garish, pumpkin-orange Penguin on a shelf otherwise reserved for volumes bound in calfskin and Moroccan leather.) One returns to Eliot for insight—much as one might turn to Coleridge. But less and less does the contemporary poet come to Eliot's essays with the expectation of hearing an inner voice exclaim: He's talking about my daily life. . .

And it is clearly Jarrell to whom we should turn if we would understand the reviews nowadays tucked away in the back of *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, or *The Threepenny Review*—or any of the other periodicals that have fought to keep the art of poetry reviewing alive. His influence on contemporary criticism has been pervasive and thoroughgoing. And to read these current reviews, intelligent and loving and well-schooled as many of them are, is to grasp how difficult to replicate is Jarrell's impulsive and insouciant style. In other hands, what might have been witty winds up looking merely whimsical; what would be irreverent, snotty; what would be biting, bilious.

If Jarrell addresses more tellingly than Eliot the situation of the contemporary poet, this may be partly attributable to the calendar. Although they died in the same year—1965—Jarrell was born in 1914 (a quarter century after Eliot) into a generation most of whose leaders were absorbed into our universities. Roethke, Berryman, Kunitz, Warren, Olson: all taught for a living. And nearly all were coming of age during a period when, their sensibilities tempered by the Second World War, the juggernaut of American industry was powering the country as no country had ever been powered before. The poets saw themselves—as so many of their letters and poems attest—as small and ignored constituents of a vast and unignorable commonwealth.

The knowledge that the previous generation—Eliot's—had engineered a literary revolution that had spurred more interest and scrutiny (as well as vitriol and resistance) than anything they themselves were likely to produce only deepened the pathos of their situation. In a sketchy early essay, "The End of the Line," Jarrell took up this suspicion forthrightly. He argued (and whether he was right or wrong, his distress remains potent) that the modernism of Eliot, Stevens, Cummings, and Moore had played itself out. For the moment, there was no ground to be broken. Lovely, indeed imperishable poems were still to be written, but there wasn't to be—at least for a while—another revolution. By the mere accident of birth date, his generation might be destined for a subsidiary role, and he asked, poignantly, "Who could endure a century of *transition*?"

Such questions bedevil succeeding gener-

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ations. In the years since "The End of the Line" was published, various brilliant and magical verses have emerged—Jarrell's prominent among them—but we don't appear to be entering an age when the very mode of poetic discourse will be upended. All but the most vainglorious of contemporary poets know something of Jarrell's sensation of lying in the trough between two great waves, of belonging to a generation that posterity will classify under the heading: Those Who Couldn't See What Would Come Next. It's a category into which we ourselves sometimes condescendingly place the Georgian Poets—who are seen planing and sanding and shellacking their boxlike quatrains while Eliot was putting together the firebomb of *The Waste Land*.

While literary history may have conspired to leave the contemporary poet feeling vulnerable and self-justifying, such feelings have been inevitably aggravated by all those social transformations that have edged the poet to the peripheries of our cultural life. If Jarrell's highly various poetry essays range around any one central theme, it would be "the obscurity of the poet," referring not to the poet's difficulty but to his social irrelevance. Time and again, implicitly and explicitly, Jarrell's essays ask: Does poetry matter to the world at large? His answer is: Less and less.

Occasionally you'll meet contemporary poets who, vindicating some private melancholy, relish their own cultural insignificance. Or poets who, with the glazed, half-shut eyes of a swimmer doing laps in a pool, insist that poetry matters more than it ever has. And there are others who dismiss the issue as largely irrelevant, and others who close off discussion by happily hauling out that old saw about the game being murderous because the stakes are so small.

To Jarrell's credit, though, he took this crucial question—the poet's obscurity—and subjected it to probing analysis. He asked: What does it mean about the poems that will be written? How does it affect the "professionalization" of the poet? Which subjects will it unconsciously abet, and which ones unconsciously suppress?

His wit and informality can sometimes mask the essays' lunging ambition. Jarrell the critic longed to paint in broad strokes, to shoot for the horizons. He yearned to clarify the fiendishly intricate relationship between a solitary, "pure" artist and a monolithic mass culture. His essays reflect the appetites of a sociologist manqué. And in his pawky way, Jarrell got the story down: he exposed the plight of the contemporary poet as no one else has done.

Jarrell was fond of quoting a phrase he'd found in an essay by a psychoanalyst, "the artist and his competitor, the critic." He harbored mixed feelings about the criticism he practiced so skillfully. His essays, into which he poured hours and hours of labor, continually belittle the role of criticism. An ambitious critic, he aspired to explain, paradoxically, "why it is that critics are of so little use to writers, why it is that they are such a poor guide to the opinions of the next age."

The untangling of his ambivalence is a complicated business. By gaining a formidable reputation as a critic, he had joined a fraternity that unsettled him in all sorts of ways. In "The Age of Criticism" he lampooned the usurpations of those who would supplant the work they ostensibly serve. ("Criticism *does* exist, doesn't it, for the sake of the plays and stories and poems it criticizes?" he mockingly asked—not fully foreseeing an age and a critical establishment for whom this question would be regarded not as a reductio ad absurdum but as a legitimate line of inquiry.) He was also disheartened by the obtuse reviews of early books by contemporaries (Berryman, Lowell, Bishop) whose gifts he recognized better than most everyone else. And he was, in his wholehearted, plunging way, impatient with critics who failed to respond to literature as passionately as he did; prudent hedging exasperated him.

In addition, the renown—and fear—his criticism inspired may have psychologically undermined him. As a critic, Jarrell was a

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quick study; as a poet, a slow starter. It wasn't until he entered his thirties that he really began to speak with assurance in verse, and most of his best poems arrived after he'd reached forty. The celebrated critic may have threatened to overshadow the slow-germinating poet.

This uneasiness perhaps explains why he left his criticism in some disarray. Although individual reviews consumed and possessed him (he once wrote to Robert Penn Warren: "Can you recite a review from memory when you finish it? I was astonished to find I could"), he was content to be somewhat lax when treating the pieces as a collection. He made little attempt to fit them into any systematic whole, to strip them of their mutual repetitions, to track down missing citations. It's easy to understand the appeal for him of leaving a few rough edges. To be "the most powerful reviewer of poetry active in this country" (as Berryman dubbed him) was one thing. But to achieve this status casually—offhandedly—was better still.

Today, Jarrell may be most widely known for his sparkling invective. He's the man who said of one of Oscar Williams's books of verse that it "gave the impression of having been written on a typewriter by a typewriter." And who noted of a contributor to *New Directions, 1941*, "Mr. Fisher is like the gold in sea water: valuable, but in impracticable concentrations." And who said of *The Shield of Achilles*, "Auden, in most of this last book, lies in himself as if he were an unmade bed, and every line in his sleepy, placid face seems to be saying: *But whoever makes beds*?"

Robert Lowell, writing a tribute to his friend after his death, offered a well-aimed corrective when he identified "eulogy" as "the glory of Randall's criticism."

> Eulogies that not only impressed readers with his own enthusiasms, but which also, time and again, changed and improved opinions and values. He left many reputations permanently altered and exalted. I think particularly of his famous Frost and Whitman essays.

Jarrell's eulogies certainly can be breathtaking. Moments of an almost uncanny affinity are established, and it's as though this particular stanza of Marianne Moore's, or this little moment in Kipling's autobiography, has just now, after having lain dormant and dusty for decades, caught a blade of sun.

But in his tribute Lowell touched on another virtue perhaps more impressive still:

> One could never say of one of his admirations, "Oh, I knew *you* would like that." His progress was not the usual youthful critic's progress from callow severity to lax benevolence. With wrinkled brow and cool fresh eye, he was forever musing, discovering, and chipping away at his own misconceptions.

One thinks, by contrast, of the legion of intelligent critics (illustrious and little-known, living and dead) of whom we can say, "Oh, I knew *you* would like that," those critics whose new review we've basically read even before we pick up the magazine in which it appears. Having written of Robert Graves "he is not a good poet" and "even his best poems just miss," Jarrell subsequently declared, "Graves is the true heir of Ben Jonson, and can give to his monstrosities, occasionally, the peculiar lyric magnificence Jonson gives them in *The Alchemist*," and "Graves's poems are a marvel and a delight, the work of a fine poet who has managed, by the strangest of processes, to make himself into an extraordinary one." And Jarrell resolved this discrepancy not by recourse to some shift in the poet's development but to a shift in his own judgment; he'd learned to read Graves better. Of B. H. Haggin, the music critic, Jarrell once said, "This sort of admission of error, of change, makes us trust a critic as nothing else but omniscience could." Trust seems the keynote here. We have faith in the improvisational, ever-adapting process embodied by Jarrell's essays, and it is precisely this openness to change, this awareness of fallibility, that renders so tonic and invigorating each of his return engagements with Stevens, Williams, Moore, Lowell.

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This unpredictability sometimes made him an uncertain ally. Jarrell loved Marianne Moore's poetry—he composed some of the most glowing testimonials ever devoted to her verse—but when he felt she'd let her emotions run away with her in her antiwar poem "In Distrust of Merits," he chided her "lack of facts, or imagination, or *something*," and once when he thought she'd made a fatuous critical judgment he referred to her as a "fool."

What is little short of astonishing, given how brutal Jarrell's disapproval could be, is that he managed to remain friends with so many of the people he reproved. He wrote of Karl Shapiro's *Trial of a Poet* that it "has been a disappointment to everybody" and that "the first third of the book, a commonplace and derivative autobiographical series, is a sort of bobby-soxer's *Mauberley*." For good measure, he pointed out that Shapiro had "sunk and sunk until one wishes that he could go back to his best book, his first, and start over from there." Incredibly, Shapiro—though a man deeply sensitive to slights—replied that he felt as if he "had been run over but not hurt." And he later wrote this memorial:

> Jarrell tried to do the impossible: to observe and make poetry of a chaos, without being either inside or outside of it. He did it better than anyone else, better than it can be done. He did it passionately and with superb control.

For good reason, the contemporary poetry world is notorious for its thin skins and its hardy rancors, and yet Jarrell often said the seemingly unforgivable and wound up being not only forgiven but commended. How in the world did he get away with it? Surely because neither his diligence nor his integrity was ever seriously in question. He was speaking for himself, too, when he praised John Crowe Ransom as a poet "wanting the light and sorry for the dark." Jarrell paid the authors he reviewed the ultimate compliment of taking their work so deeply to heart that, when it fell short, he could sound authentically despondent, even betrayed.

Lowell made a further observation that strikes me as one of the most remarkable things any poet ever said about another:

> Randall was the only man I have ever met who could make other writers feel that their work was more important to him than his own. . . . What he did was to make others feel that their realizing themselves was as close to him as his own self-realization, and that he cared as much about making the nature and goodness of someone else's work understood as he cared about making his own understood.

This unique degree of selflessness maybe explains why Jarrell, despite his harsh denunciations, was so regularly described as "generous" by those who knew him. He wrote that the writer craves a public that "reads with the calm and ease and independence that come from liking things in themselves, for themselves." And he added: "This is the kind of public that the poet would like; and if it turned out to be the kind of public that wouldn't like him, why, surely that is something he could bear. It is not his poems but poetry that he wants people to read; if they will read Rilke's and Yeats's and Hardy's poems, he can bear to have his own poems go unread forever." How plausible this sounds, and yet how far from reality it is! Jarrell's sort of generosity was rarer than he could possibly see. Think of how many poets' biographies reveal personalities who would consign Chaucer, Donne, and Tennyson entirely to the flames before relinquishing even one page of their own Selected.

To read Jarrell is to be shown, as few critics living or dead can show us, just how strewn with posturing is the criticism daily surrounding us. We grow accustomed to various rituals of judgment, with their rote gestures and unwritten formulae. As readers we learn to accept—like citizens of a country with a collapsing monetary system—

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that some fair proportion of our currency will be counterfeit.

It's the usual custom, for instance, for a critic who is slamming a book to single out two or three items for praise. One does this as an earnest of one's fairness and objectivity—and, covertly, as a means of making one's indictments all the more stinging. But Jarrell went through the routine motions unroutinely. More than *any* critic I've ever read he brought sincerity to the compliments he injected into an otherwise negative review. He had an unmatched ability to find, in a book he otherwise abominated, a stanza or a paragraph that pleased him heartily. It was absolutely like Jarrell to be able to reconcile, in contiguous paragraphs, a pair of judgments as opposed as these on Yvor Winters: "His practical misvaluations, at their most extraordinary, rival the Himalayas" and "Winters's clear, independent, and serious talent has produced criticism that no cultivated person can afford to leave unread."

It's remarkable how seldom a reader of Jarrell winds up asking, Why is he saying this? The answer is patent: he is saying it because that's how he feels. He may be mistaken, but he isn't being devious. When he calls a book luminous, you sense he has personally basked in its light; when he calls it abject, you know he has been cast down. Placed beside him, other critics tend to look anemic and their judgments sound paltering.

Taking a page from Jarrell's own book, we might indulge in a fanciful hypothetical. Let's assume that someone from an alien world, a Merman, found his way into one of our university libraries and sought to understand us through our literary and scholarly journals. To such a creature, wouldn't the one unifying trait of our criticism (the one linking analyses of Homer to deconstructions of Calvin Klein ads, studies of the theme of Christian recusancy in medieval Icelandic sagas to critiques of subway performance artists) be its elaborate defensiveness? And wouldn't this tell our Merman a great deal about the larger academy where these pieces were bred? He wouldn't have to meet a single critic in order to hypothesize that this is a perilous realm, whose inhabitants perpetually expect to be preyed upon. He could deduce this merely from our penchant for qualifying our qualifications, for substantiating the inarguable, for running in place while ostentatiously huffing and puffing.

Jarrell temperamentally shrank from most such qualifications—from the desire to protect himself. When he said "But taking the chance of making a complete fool of himself—and, sometimes, doing so—is the first demand that is made upon any real critic," he was espousing a credo he lived by. He loved sweeping utterances. In whatever he read, he was forever searching for the text's fingerprint, its unique identification, which would allow him to utter the phrase that, for him as a critic, was perhaps the richest in the language: "No other book . . ." His criticism constantly drives toward these words, or some variation on them. We are told of *The Man Who Loved Children* that it "makes you a part of one family's immediate existence as no other book quite does." Of Eleanor Ross Taylor's *A Wilderness of Ladies* that "no poems can tell you better what it is like to be a woman." Of Kipling that "the family romance, the two families of the Hero, have so predominant a place in no other writer." Of Elizabeth Bishop, "I don't know of any other poet with so high a proportion of good poems." Of Graves's *Collected Poems*, "Some are extraordinary, many are masterly, all are like nothing else ever written." Above all else, what he wanted as a critic was to be able to declare, "Not since an anonymous Akkadian scribe began to score the epic of Gilgamesh into a clay tablet has anyone. . . ."

Jarrell's prescience may have worked, unfortunately, to blunt his boldness. Over time, many of his wildest pronouncements have become orthodoxy, thereby encouraging a later generation to regard him as less daring than he was. Perhaps he suffers from having been so often right.

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In 1962 he delivered an extraordinary lecture, "Fifty Years of American Poetry," in which he offered a panoramic appraisal of American poetry from 1910 to 1960. It's a tour de force for all sorts of reasons, but primarily for the way in which its characterizations have become our own. He might be surveying a half-century of American poetry not from the perspective of the early Sixties but from that of the late Nineties.

The "other" Frost that Jarrell discerned behind the genial, homespun New England rustic—the "dark" Frost who was desperate, frightened, and brave—has become the Frost we've all learned to recognize, and the little-known poems Jarrell singled out as central to the Frost canon are now to be found in most anthologies. Much the same could be said about his judgments of Williams, Ransom, Stevens, Moore, Cummings, Aiken, and Lowell. In recent years, Elizabeth Bishop has become an impregnable figure—a bulwark of the canon—but who except Jarrell was saying, as early as 1955, "Her *Poems* seems to me one of the best books an American poet has ever written"? And even in his quickest, most offhand judgments, he prefigured much of the criticism that would follow. Jarrell never got around to an essay on Eliot, but in "Fifty Years of American Poetry" he made a few telling remarks:

> Won't the future say to us in helpless astonishment: "But did you actually believe all those things about objective correlatives, classicism, the tradition, applied to his poetry? Surely you must have seen that he was one of the most subjective and daemonic poets who ever lived, the victim and helpless beneficiary of his own inexorable compulsions, obsessions?"

That future is now, and our shelves are awash with Eliot studies intent on pointing up the discrepancy between Eliot the theorist and Eliot the man and poet.

I recently picked up a substantial book of essays on Frost published by a leading university press. In its contributors, topics, and methods, it seemed a representative showcase of contemporary academic criticism. I looked up Jarrell in the index. Now, Jarrell's two essays on Frost were milestones. As much as anything he ever did, they won him the extravagant praise that was heaped on him (by Ransom, who regarded *Poetry and the Age* as "almost epoch-making"; by Lowell, who called him "a critic of genius"; by Bishop, who deemed him "the best and most generous critic of poetry I have known"; by Tate, who rated him "a great prose-stylist"; by Berryman, who said that among living critics there was "nobody better"; by Rich, who judged him "a kind of conscience of poetry"). But Jarrell's name was hardly to be found. He was packed away in a pair of footnotes, a couple of stray and grudging quotations. But, Jarrell himself—as opposed to his name—was ubiquitous, his views having been, covertly or ignorantly, everywhere appropriated. It's a shame we have today no second Jarrell on the scene to comment on the fate of the original Jarrell. The ironies are piquant. It seems the critical establishment represented by our university English departments, for all its proud iconoclasm, is constitutionally uncomfortable with an informal, brazen, unfootnoted diamond-in-the-rough like Jarrell; his views need to be digested, and reformatted, before they can be deemed authoritative and citation-worthy.

The passing decades, having vindicated Jarrell's clairvoyance, leave us to ponder what he would have made of some of the celebrated works of our time. I've never found myself wondering what judgments Bogan or Winters or Tate or Blackmur—all critics I've read with interest—might have reached had they lived longer. But I have yearned to know what Jarrell would have made of Berryman's *Dream Songs*, Merrill's *Changing Light at Sandover*, Walcott's *Omeros*. He is missed in a way those others aren't.

It's a great shame, too, he never got around to writing on Wordsworth ("one of the three or four greatest of English poets")

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or *Antony and Cleopatra* ("the supreme literary expression of our culture"). Had he lived to a full age, he would surely have expanded his essays, and cleaned and clarified them a bit. Various other small vices would doubtless have remained, however, woven as they are into the fiber of the man.

It seems fair to say that Jarrell devoted more time and space than was wise to poets of no lasting interest. Too often he let himself be drawn into trying to calibrate whether poet A or B was *thoroughly* bad or at times rose up and achieved mediocrity. True, he panned their verses with hilarious dexterity: he usually managed to flay rather than flog a dead horse. Still, he might better have left the corpse to decompose on its own.

One vice is simultaneously vexing and endearing: his frequent conviction that the point he's making is self-evident. He's constantly holding up a stanza or a passage and crying, in effect, "Nothing more need be said! Only an idiot could be unmoved!" Which is fine just so long as you share his enthusiasm. When you don't, you're left having to reply, "As an idiot, I wish you would further explain to me. . ."

Even so, I'd rather receive puzzlement from Jarrell's hands than elucidation from most anyone else. He once pointed out that "Art is long, and critics are the insects of the day," and added, "Unless you are one critic in a hundred thousand, the future will quote you only as an example of the normal error of the past."

Surely this one exception—the one hypothetical survivor—would need to be not only surpassingly bright but peerlessly bold. Lowell said of his friend, "Getting out on a limb was a daily occurrence for him." To my mind, Randall Jarrell was the one critic in a hundred thousand who continually climbed out on a branch that couldn't possibly support his weight and discovered that—thanks to his balance, buoyancy, nimbleness—the branch held.

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Eça de Queirós

by Alexander Coleman

There is a photograph of the Portuguese novelist José Maria Eça de Queirós (1845–1900) surrounded by his friends in a Lisbon salon in the late 1880s. They all convey a notable elegance of attire and toilette—striped pants, burnished top hats, abundant beards, and finely-waxed upturned moustaches. Eça de Queirós is seated at a table in front of the group, walking stick in hand, eyes cast down demurely. This group of eleven men represented the intellectual elite of Portugal at that time. They were poets, diplomats, statesmen, politicians who for a time gathered weekly at the Hotel Braganza or at the home of one of the group.

Energetic achievers in many realms, they paradoxically called themselves *Os vencidos da vida* ("Those defeated by life"). The morose title given to the group has as much to do with the apparent glories of Portugal's past—the adventures in Brazil, Africa, and India—as with the tedium and political paralysis which reigned in Portugal throughout the nineteenth century (and from which it has hardly escaped in the twentieth). *Os vencidos* were both children of an exhausted romanticism and freshly-minted students of Marx and Proudhon. As such, they had critical insights into the decadence of Portugal and were ready with remedies that would bring about a long-awaited spiritual and political salvation.

But as intellectuals who absorbed the French critical spirit wholesale, in both its eighteenth- and nineteenth-century formulations, they were dogged by a pessimism about what really might be done with the country once their generation came to power. They did come to power, and nothing really changed. Their idealism foundered on the torpor of traditional Portugal. Eça's perverse explanation of the meaning behind the label *Os vencidos da vida* is worthy of note:

> If a young man has as his supreme ideal in life the career of hairdresser, and he attains that station, he is a conqueror, a great conqueror of life. If, on the other hand, a young man of twenty wants to be a millionaire, a sublime poet, or an undefeated general, and after the most strenuous effort reaches only halfway toward the vaunted million, the poem, or the full regalia of a general, then he is to all effects someone who is defeated in life, a dead man alive, all dressed up for burial with his frock coat and top hat concealing the luster of resignation before life.

This is pure Eça de Queirós—boundless energies expended in a critical attack against old, Catholic Portugal while being consciously aware of the futility of the enterprise. As for his readership, the census taken in the year of Eça's death tallied only 21 percent of the populace as at all literate; he knew from the start that Portugal moves only belatedly, and sometimes takes a step or two back in time at that.

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Eça's achievement as a writer is imposing by any measure. A recent edition of his complete works in Portuguese—in painfully small print—makes up over five thousand pages of stories, novellas, novels, literary and political essays, a book about traveling through Egypt on the occasion of the opening of the Suez Canal, hundreds of letters, even an inexplicable translation of H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. Eça's major novels gradually found their way into English in the 1950s and 1960s. The retentive reader now "getting on in years" may vaguely recall the titles of those translations, now mostly out of print—*The Sin of Father Amaro*, *Cousin Bazilio*, *The Mandarin*, *The Relic*, *The Maias*, *The Illustrious House of Ramires*, *The City and the Mountains*—along with the attendant prologues and enthusiastic reception by such critics as Francis Steegmuller and Stanley Edgar Hyman. Just recently, New Directions published a new translation of a lurid novella by Eça under the title *The Yellow Sofa*, and has also reissued Eça's masterpiece *The Illustrious House of Ramires* with a preface by V. S. Pritchett. There is also an edition of the fantasy novel *The Relic* available from the Dedalus Press. At this juncture, all the rest of his fiction and work in other genres, such as the delicious *Letters from England*, has long gone out of print.

I bring up the existence of my own study of his novels, *Eça de Queirós and European Realism* (New York University Press, 1980) only to dramatize how much fury and rage the personality and work of this author can still awaken in a particular ideological and religious sector of Portuguese readership. Just after the publication of my book, a grand dame of Lisbon expressed to me her displeasure upon hearing that Eça's work was beginning to have at least a fitful readership in the United States. "That dreadful man," she intoned, "did irreparable damage to Portugal, and he will never be forgiven." This is the same writer that Emile Zola characterized as "greater than my own dear master Flaubert." To some Portuguese of a certain cast of mind, Eça still remains merely the provocateur, the monocled dandy, the enemy of old beliefs and settled custom.

His critical invective against Portugal—against the mythification of ancient glories, for instance—and his debunking of the prowess of its adventurers, discoverers, and colonizers, were "barbs," as he called them, designed to shock the nation into a realization of what were the true effects of Portugal's colonial activities. Like Spain in its relation to its "colonies" in the Americas, Portugal in his view came to be a supplicant in relation to Brazil:

> We [Portuguese] were in that dreary position towards them of an old aristocrat, a broken old bachelor, toothless and tottering, who trembles and dribbles before a buxom comely housekeeper. It was we who were really the colony: and it was with a fearfully beating heart, between a *Salve Regina* and a *Laus perenne*, that we held out our hands there for alms.

In his early years and well into maturity, Eça was the incarnation of resentment against Portuguese society as he found it. He had his reasons.

When pressed about his childhood, early years and adolescence, he would dismiss the topic from any inquiry or conversation. As he curtly declared to a friend, "Facts for my biography—I don't know how to provide any. I am just like the Republic of Andorra—I don't have a history." The melodrama of the circumstances of his birth and formative years explains why he took such pains to remain silent.

José Maria Eça de Queirós was born in 1845 of unmarried parents. His father was a local judge just out of law school, the mother barely nineteen. On the baptismal certificate, she is listed as "mother unknown." Seven days before she gave birth, Eça's father sent a gelid letter addressed simply to "Madame" ("Senhora"), assuring her that the child would be removed from her sight and educated by him. Because of his lower

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station in society—her family was of middling aristocratic lineage close to the monarchy—she refused to marry the miscreant until her mother, on her deathbed, finally extracted the daughter's reluctant assent to marry the man. The ceremony took place in 1849, four years after the birth of the child. Although the now legitimate couple in due course had six more children, the infant "born before time" was not permitted to live with the family—those he had every right to think of as father, mother, brothers, and sisters—until he had graduated from the University of Coimbra some twenty-one years later. Moreover, Eça's parents did not formally recognize him until producing a dry document for legal purposes just before Eça's own marriage *forty-one* years later, in 1886, a ceremony neither parent chose to attend.

Eça was essentially an orphan, first cared for by a wet nurse, then handed over to the paternal grandparents, then off to boarding school, then university. Vacations were spent with an aunt. In all his five-thousand pages of texts, mothers or fathers are rarely present. Eça was the rejected child, the *enjeitadinho*. Most of the protagonists in his novels are either orphans or cared for by proxy authority figures. Needless to say, Freudian critics have pondered heavily over the relation of his early childhood to the kind of retributive literature he was to produce over the years.

As an undergraduate at the hallowed University of Coimbra, he was both an avid amateur actor and distant participant in student uprisings. Eça remembered those extracurricular activities much later: "In four years we instigated three student revolutions with all the classic elements in place: manifestoes to the populace, rock throwing and street uproars, a rusty pistol underneath every cape, fiery effigies of rectors burning away as we executed jungle dances around the pyre." With law degree in hand, he tried out a career as journalist in the provinces and as quondam lawyer, but these attempts each lasted for only a few months. Out of the blue (but probably due to his father's machinations), an invitation was received by "Monsieur le Chevalier de Queirós" to attend the opening of the Suez Canal. He left Lisbon in October 1869, in the company of a good friend, Count Luís Resende, who became his brother-in-law seventeen years later when Eça married Emília de Resende.

If Eça's journalism and occasional writings before the Egyptian trip are a mélange of conflicting allegiances, ranging from fiery social revolutionary to dour Proudhonian moralist, another Eça magically appeared in Cairo:

> I confess that in the Turkish baths, under the magnetic pressure of the masseur, listening to the water dripping in the hookah, I decided that all vices and all crimes were natural, rational, and legitimate! I wanted to be a caliph, I wanted to sleep on divans of satin, enveloped in the aroma of aloes and the perfume of roses . . . I would eat delicious, spicy things, I would order that the stomachs of my slaves be cut open in order to examine the disposition of their entrails, I would cut off the heads of Abyssinian women in order to feel the warm blood of those hot-tempered women of the Nile, I would drape pearls over my hounds, I would forget my people, and I would order that all bodies that were not divinely beautiful be tossed into the Nile!
>
> Happily my jacket made in Nottingham, England was hanging right there as a presence of reality, as a wholesome memento.

After leaving Cairo, Eça and Count Resende visited the pyramids of Giza and the temples and ruins of Memphis. After attending the inauguration of the canal, they went on to Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon, returning to Lisbon on January 3, 1870.

Upon his return, Eça found his friends in a state of high intellectual ferment. They were organizing a series of public lectures, which would expose the deteriorated state of Portuguese society and culture and offer prescriptions for a spiritual renewal. One participant took on the subject of "The

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Causes of the Decadence of the Iberian People," another gave a critical overview of the present state of Portuguese literature. Eça chose to be the standard bearer of "Realism as an Expression of New Art." Almost as a sartorial defense against this championing of Flaubert, Zola, and Courbet, Eça appeared before the public dressed as an elegant diplomat ready to present his credentials at the Court of Saint James: "Irreproachable buttoned-up frock coat, high collar, white vest, satin tie, glossy shoes, gray gloves," according to one observer. The arguments in the lecture, on the other hand, were primitive. According to Eça, realism should be a literature proceeding from experience through physiology, "the science of temperaments and inner character." In his glosses of Flaubert, Eça saw the new literary science only as an instrument for *o artista vingador* ("the vengeful artist"), the denunciatory moralist exposing the vulgarities and pretensions of the new democratic age. The lecture got many things wrong from the point of view of critical accuracy, but it was more than enough of a platform for him to launch his first major novel, *The Sin of Father Amaro*, in its three successive versions: 1875, 1876, and the definitive amplification of 1880.

Eighteen-seventy-one was Eça's last year resident in his own country. After entering the foreign service of Portugal, he was posted first to Cuba (1872–1874), then on to Newcastle-on-Tyne, remaining immensely productive in what he considered to be inhospitable circumstances. He then was sent to Bristol in 1878 (only marginally more pleasant), and finally held the esteemed ranking of Portuguese consul in Paris from 1888 until 1900, the year of his death, probably of a repeatedly undiagnosed amoebic dysentery.

Accompanying the insistent Freudianism of Eça's critics, much has been made of his exile after 1872, and even more has been made of his marriage to Emília de Resende in 1886. At just over forty years of age, Eça de Queirós married a woman of twenty-eight who was his polar opposite—she was relatively uneducated, a severely conservative Catholic, pious and God-fearing in the extreme, just as he was the representative of Voltairean sarcasm and irreverence toward the phenomenon of belief in general. As he described himself around this time, "I am the carcass of an old cynic." His letters to his friends, and even to his future brother-in-law, point to a *mariage de raison*. After all, four of her sisters had already entered the convent, and she had just been abruptly jilted by another member of *Os vencidos*, Luís de Soveral.

Until their respective dying days, Eça de Queirós's four children furiously denied any kind of cynical arrangement or emotional compromise in their parents' sentimental relations, and swore to their father's undying love for their mother. Nonetheless, a perusal of the complete correspondence between husband and wife, including his gruesome final letters from Southern France and Switzerland where he went in a futile search for a cure, points to a willful determination on his part to create a home and a family anyway, anyhow, and to feign and disguise the inner self in order to attain these things—the ambiance that was so assiduously denied him in his childhood.

What also was consistently denied him and his family was any degree of financial security. Eça was an extravagant spender, it is true, but he was ill-paid even as consul in Paris and was the victim of high piracy on the part of his Lisbon publishers. He never came anywhere near to getting out from under monstrous debts. Even the last letters to his wife continually harp on the need for household economies. She, in turn, seems always to be without a sou in their Neuilly home. In any case, at the time none of the four children had any idea that their father was a writer, an artist. They were thrilled with his being a consul, and that was that. Until her death in 1934, the widow assiduously celebrated his memory, but at the same time she did everything in her power to prevent the publication of texts she considered indecent. When, in 1922, Valéry

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Larbaud asked for permission to have Eça's most scabrous and irreverent novel, *The Relic*, translated into French, permission was denied. Indeed, one study of incest between mother and son, *A Tragédia da Rua das Flores*, remained in manuscript and was not published until 1980; such was the censorious legacy of Emília de Resende.

Eça's permanent exile from Portugal, in spite of lengthy consular leaves, produced a crisis in the formative principles of his literature, a crisis which at the same time was a catalyst to write another kind of literature not so slavishly dependent upon what he finally got to think of as realist dogma. As always, he is his own best critic:

> I cannot depict Portugal in Newcastle. In order to write any page, any line, I have to make two violent efforts: disengage myself entirely from the impression which I get from the society around me and then evoke, by means of a tension of reminiscence, the society which is far away. This makes my characters less and less Portuguese, but they are not more English because of this; they are beginning to be conventional . . . either I go back to the environment in which I can produce, by the experimental method—that is, return to Portugal—or I will have to surrender to a purely fantastical and humorous literature.

As an early admiring student of Flaubertian meticulousness, Eça in his first two novels gives us a baleful vision of provincial Portuguese society. This is the background busily laid out in *The Sin of Father Amaro* with its rich cast of gossips, useless functionaries, and aged but still lusty spinsters all under the thrall of gourmand clerics with easy sexual mores. Here, eros is the anarchic force, the shatterer of propriety. The fervent parishioner Amélia is seduced by the young Father Amaro just out of the seminary. After she gives birth, the infant is taken away by the crazed priest and drowned (in the first two versions) or handed over to a sinister female custodian, "the weaver of angels," who disposes of the infant by neglect within a month (final version). In his second novel, *Cousin Bazilio*, the happily married but bored Luiza—modelled distantly on Emma Bovary but drawn with more compassion than the implacable Flaubert's heroine—dies of a mysterious malady after her frivolous seduction by the interloper Cousin Bazilio. As sympathetic observer and moral monitor, Eça brings Luiza's predicaments and quandaries to life, all while having her as-yet-unknowing husband, Jorge, say some terrible things about the fate of any adulteress, without, of course, having his wife in mind:

> "If the husband is deceived, I'm for death. I don't care if it's in an abyss, a room, or the street—she must be killed. Kill her at once!" They all protested at this outburst of Jorge's, calling him a "wild beast," "Othello," "Bluebeard," and so on. Jorge only laughed, peacefully filling his pipe. Luiza sat crocheting in silence.

In early Eça, eros is indecorous at the very least, often illegitimate by nature, and vertiginously suicidal at the very worst. Venus was a perilous goddess for Eça—he called her *Venus Tenebrosa*, or "Sinister Venus." Between desire and the social order, society does prevail, and the adulterer of any sex is hounded out, if not eliminated. As for the child born out of wedlock, it must be cast aside, if not worse. His writings from around this time, aside from their rich orchestration of provincial inanities, revolve around the games of love and marriage, the consequences of the passionate life. After all, Eça himself was a "born" expert in all these matters—too much eros, too little agapē.

If all the foregoing gives the impression of an author who began his career on a path of unremitting grimness under the sway of French realism and naturalism, things do lighten up considerably, although the tragic sense is never lost. The problems of being a writer in exile were indeed taxing, but Eça's reading of Dickens, George Eliot, and Thackeray during the English years had a

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soothing effect. They broadened his vision and softened what might be thought of as the novelistic preaching of the early years. Furthermore, there was a growing disenchantment with France. As he fulfilled his long-cherished dream of permanent residency in Paris, he began to sever the spiritual bond that had sustained him throughout his student years as fledgling literary theoretician and as a writer renowned for being the foremost exponent of realism in the Portuguese language.

Not exactly a volte-face, this was part of the ongoing process of self-criticism which was his own tortured way of making literature. Self-doubt was a paradoxically driving force in him. At times he diminished himself—these critical flagellations were always administered to his own writing after a particularly distinguished work was finished. For instance, having just published the taut *Cousin Bazilio*, Eça brings up the glaring distance he senses between what he has just achieved and the French masters. No one seems able to tell him that this is hardly the point:

> By the way, what did you think of *Cousin Bazilio*? Idiotic, don't you think? "Ce n'est pas ça. Ce n'est pas ça du tout." The style is limpid, it has energy, transparence, precision, "netteté." But there is no life in it. It lacks "vigor" (poigne). The characters—you will see—do not have the sense of life that we have; they are not exactly "des images découpées," but they have a gelatinous musculature. . . . I construct cardboard worlds . . . some little thing is missing within, the small cerebral vibration; I am an irremissible imbecile.

Perhaps mechanisms to elicit contrary praise from friends, these exercises by this literary anchorite could fill a very peculiar anthology; they all point to a *via negativa* in his own processes, goads to do better or simply something else.

The two fantasy novels of the 1880s—*The Mandarin* and *The Relic*—are to many his supreme achievements. The new direction is indicated in the prologue (written in French) to a translation of *The Mandarin*, where the latest version of Eça as writer has a bracing dialogue with the Eça of old. The new writer breezily dismisses the tenets of realism—"We tried to put in our works much observation, much 'humanity'; but in studying our neighbors, small rentiers, or petty employees, it turned out that we soon regretted those times when it was permissible, without being old-fashioned, to celebrate handsome knights in shining armor." The Portuguese artist has suffered too long, he says, in an atmosphere of reality, modernity, and banality. He asks for temporary license to unfetter the imagination, "where one no longer accepts the inconvenient submission to truth, to the torture of analysis, to the impertinent tyranny of reality."

While *The Mandarin* has this prologue of considerable theoretical importance, *The Relic* is by far the better book, if only because of the fact that its insouciance, its celebration of duplicity and hypocrisy marks an imaginative liberation in Eça. It is his most jocose venture into the episodic picaresque genre.

Young Teodorico is a hedonist parasite living as coddled nephew of the aged ultra-Catholic spinster Aunt Titi. She possesses a fortune that he will inherit if he leads a saintly life. Seeing what must be done but being who he is, he begins an orgy of dissimulation—daily mass dressed in black, luncheons with Aunt Titi and a group of malevolent back-biting priests, followed up by evenings spent with a treacherous Spanish prostitute; he is always home by eleven, just in time for the nightly litany.

As the coronation of his duplicity, he promises to take a trip to the Holy Land to bring her back a relic which will guarantee her good health and eternal life in the other world. On the way, another kind of relic is obtained by Teodorico—a nightdress given to him by a golden-haired English beauty, "in remembrance of all our joy." Once in Jerusalem, he visits the Holy Sepulchre in top hat and gloves, obtains something that

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looks like a crown of thorns, and wraps it in a package identical to the one containing the nightdress. In a drunken dream, he witnesses Christ's condemnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, all while brandishing a very contemporary Cuban cigar. As Eça's character sees Christ's final moments, he is drugged, brought down off the cross, duly placed in the tomb, but dies soon after. The Resurrection is promulgated nonetheless, for "it is necessary that the prophecies be fulfilled."

Back in Lisbon, it is perhaps inevitable that Teodorico presents Aunt Titi not with the promised crown of thorns, but with the sullied nightgown in the identical packaging. With her cries of "Swine" ringing in his ears, he is disinherited, his only regret being that he was incapable of affirming at the crucial moment, without qualms, that the garment was "the nightdress of Saint Mary Magdalene. . . . Who would have doubted such an absurdity?"

As a grand *boutade*, there is nothing like it in all of Eça's work; its boisterous invention and richly organized subversiveness make it also a special literary artifact in European fiction. First brought into print in English by Alfred A. Knopf in 1925, reissued in the fifties, and again in 1995, this is a novel that begs for reconsideration.

All throughout the 1880s, in a parallel effort accompanying these two works of a "fantastic" nature, Eça was carefully preparing another analysis of and assault on the nature of Portuguese society, its many faults and foibles. This grand novel of some 630-odd pages in the last available English translation is called *The Maias* (1888). A history of the decline of a family over three generations, it is his most carefully elaborated work and the one which reflects his most pressing ambitions toward a historical, political, and societal fidelity to what he saw as the continuing crisis in Portugal in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Again, we can calculate the greatness of the novel by the invective that the author directed against it during a long gestation. For instance, here he is in a letter to a friend dated 1884.

> I am plugging away at *The Maias*, that vast machine of al fresco painting in annoyingly monumental proportions, done with darkish colors, overblown and frivolous, all of which may well earn me the name of the Michelangelo of the insipid. Oh well.

Plot is the least of *The Maias*, following the fortunes of the family from the generation of old Afonso da Maia, an austere and grave gentleman of benevolent and generous spirit, to his son Pedro, a suicide after having been abandoned by a treacherous wife, down to his only grandson, Carlos Eduardo, orphaned at an early age and brought up by Afonso. This appealing yet vague and undirected child will in due course take as his mistress and future wife a woman later discovered to be his sister, long ago abducted by the mother and thought to be dead.

This is the kind of tawdry operatic libretto which Eça adored and loved to work with, since he always fed on the inane and the ludicrous—the materials of melodrama. Against the weight of the plot, Eça paints magnificent scenery of a whole class wasting away its life—an excursion to Sintra, a horserace at the Hippodrome, a scene at the newspaper, a mock duel, a literary soirée at a theater. In the novel, there are no longer any Manichaean commonplaces in the making of the characters but rather a density in human complexity that the author had not achieved before. And, unlike any other novel of Eça, the characters age before our eyes; the erosion of time moves both characters and events toward a fatal conclusion.

Another singular aspect of *The Maias* is the spectacle of Eça inserting himself in his novel as an alter ego named João de Ega. Like Eça, who always used to insist that "Portugal was a country translated from the French into slang," João de Ega, with his "cashmere spats, long hair, and tie with an opal horseshoe pin," will declaim that

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"Everything is imported in this country: laws, ideas, philosophies, themes, aesthetics, sciences, styles, industries, fashions, manners, jokes. Everything reaches us in packing cases by the mail-boat."

João de Ega is a writer in the long process of producing an epic, "The History of an Atom," which will describe the story of his atoms since the beginning of time: the primeval muck, then to a plant, then to an orangutan, then on to the lips of Plato and Jesus. "It's a Bible," his friends insist.

The incest in *The Maias* is the culmination not only of Eça's dark views about the passions, but also of his picture of the idle upper class of Lisbon working away at its own brand of futilities. As an observer noted, "The incest represents [a] kind of narcissism, the sterility of an elite." It is the summation of a class enclosed within the walls of its egos, their own circles, their own kind. For Eça de Queirós, there was no other Portugal—the illiterate silent peasant was only "landscape."

As noted above, only three works of Eça de Queirós are currently in print. One, *The Illustrious House of Ramires* (New Directions) was published in the year of the author's death without his having gone over the galley proofs with his usual "Benedictine" care. The novel tells of a charming, Mittyish aristocrat, the last remains of a feudal lineage going back to the tenth century, who for therapeutic reasons is in the process of writing a Scott-like historical novel drawing on martial events from the family history. As he writes (with many gory samples gleefully furnished by Eça) the protagonist becomes, by means of this parodic pastiche, an artist in life, newly galvanized as practicing politician and colonist in Africa. This is Eça's most mordant and affectionate view of what a "return to old values" signified for him at the end. As always, the heroics of the past dissolve away into comic deflations in the present.

Besides *The Relic*, the only other work now available to us, *The Yellow Sofa*, also under the New Directions imprint, is quite another matter, and deserves some comment. After Eça's death in 1900, a mass of unpublished manuscripts was brought back to Portugal, where it remained for a considerable number of years. Many of these manuscripts were brought to light by Eça's not untalented son, also named José Maria d'Eça de Queirós. These works, such as the one here presented as *The Yellow Sofa*, gradually appeared seriatim in the 1920s. The son was praised for the filial care and scruple which he had so obviously applied to them. It was assumed, no proof to the contrary, that the son had simply deciphered the scrawls and put everything in order. But now that a new critical edition of Eça de Queirós is in process under the general editorship of Professor Carlos Reis of the University of Coimbra, we now discover that the son had authorial ambitions of his own. He was not the modest transmitter of his father's texts, but rather an energetic and highly aggressive editor and author.

In the particular case of *The Yellow Sofa* (known in Portuguese as *Alves & Ca.*), the new critical edition of this novella demonstrates that the son took it upon himself to improve the text he found in his father's trunk. According to the analysis of Jonathan Keates in his treatment of the matter in the *Times Literary Supplement* (October 17, 1997), "semi-colons and dashes were either changed into commas or else silently removed, the syntax and grammatical structure of sentences were rearranged, and José Maria saw nothing wrong with interpolating additional adjectives in order to intensify the tone at certain points in the story." In another volume of this critical edition, it was found that the son had made some 15,000 alterations to his father's take-off on Balzac's *Lost Illusions*, the work Eça tentatively titled *The Capital!*

So it would seem that all of the son's energetic disinterment of his father's posthumous legacy will have to be scrutinized and cleansed with great scholarly care. In the case of this translated version of Eça's son's edition of *The Yellow Sofa*, the reader

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can take up this story of a Lisbon businessman cuckolded by his partner at the office who finally takes back his wife and forgives her, with a considerable degree of confidence in its literary efficacy. However, as noted above, a scrupulous edition of this same work has been issued by the distinguished scholar Professor Luiz Fagundes Duarte, and it is quite different from the son's version. The professor's is more pungent and economical, all retouches removed.

In retrospect, Eça's readers should not have put so much faith in what we now know to be bogus authorship disguised as filial zeal. In any case, it is good to know that fresh versions of the Queirósian canon, posthumous or not, will be available in due course, minus the emendations.

The Nobel Prize for literature was recently awarded to José Saramago, the first writer in the Portuguese language to be so honored. Eça de Queirós could never have been a candidate, for the simple reason that he died the year before the first prizes were announced. But Eça would surely have wryly recognized a brotherhood of critical spirit between himself and Saramago, a political dissident (longtime member of the Communist party), pointed critic of Portuguese traditionalism, and equally an exile, though in this case a voluntary one in livid protest against the Portuguese government's refusal to offer his works as official candidates for international literary awards. Saramago's novels take up many of the political themes in Eça's work, but they view them with an optic which reminds many readers of the luminous mythification of political realities in the work of Gabrial García Márquez. But Saramago is very much his own vituperative self. In any case, the choice of Saramago, as is often the case with the Nobel Prize for literature, represents an award to a neglected, if not abandoned, body of literature heretofore not given proper recognition by whoever is responsible for the creation of the canonic list of "masterpieces of world literature."

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Max Beckmann & the School of Paris

by Karen Wilkin

The immediate response to "Beckmann and Paris" is a classic, brow-smiting, "Of course!"[1] Setting the modern German master's paintings alongside pictures by the French artists he admired and regarded as his peers is the obvious way to think about Beckmann. Still it is an imaginative, persuasive achievement by the show's curators, since no exhibition like this has been organized before. Yet anyone who has looked attentively at Beckmann's work is aware of how different it is from that of the Expressionists, his German contemporaries with whom he is frequently linked. This is not to discount the abundant evidence of Beckmann's deep Northern roots; it's plain that he owed an enormous debt to the most progressive German painters of the generation preceding his, Max Liebermann and Lovis Corinth, who offered a model of expressive realism in place of the idealized romanticism of "official" nineteenth-century German art. Plainer still, Beckmann's taste for Nordic myths and symbols, his love for the theatrical and the grotesque, and his super-heated palette of jewel-like colors, all make his work seem irreducibly Germanic.

In fact, despite its originality and individuality, the "northernness" of Beckmann's art is so palpable and pervasive that it is easy to see why he is usually grouped with the German Expressionists. Yet it is equally easy to see that apart from this shared regional flavor (and a common distaste for the tawdriness of modern life) there is very little that connects the Expressionists' rough-hewn images of a savage but familiar world with Beckmann's carefully staged conflations of the sideshow, the society party, and the hallucination. His art seems to align itself with a conception of modernism quite different from the *Brücke*'s brutalized Fauvism or the *Blaue Reiter*'s forays into the shallows of abstraction. Not even Nolde's fiercely archaic religious dramas are as disquieting as Beckmann's crowded encounters between acrobats and Fisher Kings, stylish men in dinner jackets and sinister women in decolleté gowns.

Beckmann shares none of Nolde's self-conscious primitivism, none of Kirchner's slashing bad-boy violence, none of Kandinsky's transcendental ambivalence. The way Beckmann fuses the heroic and the cynical seems entirely his own—in terms of painting, that is, since his images often seem like visual equivalents of Brecht's symbolic dramas, complete with the deliberate revelation of artifice and means, minus the Marxism. (Beckmann's own stylized, rather peculiar ventures into playwriting, recently published in English, explore similar territory.)

1 "Beckmann and Paris" opened at the Saint Louis Art Museum on February 6, 1999 and will be on view until May 9. It was previously seen at the Kunsthaus Zürich from September 25, 1998 until January 3, 1999. A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Tobia Bezzola and Cornelia Homburg, has been published by Taschen (240 pages, $39.99).

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What sets Beckmann apart most from his German contemporaries is the fact that no matter how unsettling the rituals enacted in his pictures, no matter how urgently he seems to have composed his densely populated tableaux, he remains acutely sensitive to the nuances of facture. There always seems to be *exactly* the right amount of paint deposited on a Beckmann canvas; each passage of color, whether brilliant or subdued, seems exquisitely adjusted, calibrated to demonstrate a perfect equilibrium of intensity, materiality, and delicacy—with a slight leaning toward materiality. Lights and brights appear not simply to have been placed on top of an existing plane of color, but to have been wrestled to the surface through a sea of darker paint. The sheer physical presence of pigment on a surface is so strong that Beckmann's most powerful pictures often seem to derive their energy from a tug of war between compelling imagery and pure painting. No matter how much he compresses and wrenches the space of his jam-packed compositions, Beckmann never allows the discomfort and claustrophobia of his implied narratives to overwhelm his exquisitely modulated surfaces, his firm drawing, or his robustly modelled forms. A sense of near-classical order and logic wars with his often disturbing subject matter and flattened structures, adding to the tension already created by the struggle between image and illusion.

This admixture of modernist audacity with rationality, restraint, and elegance is an important component of Beckmann's art. That this is not usually true of German Expressionist painting helps explain why his work looks so different, but the fusion of daring and refinement that characterizes Beckmann's art is not uniquely his. Quite the contrary, it is typical of many of the most adventurous painters in Paris before the Second World War. And, in fact, it is impossible to look at Beckmann's sturdy-limbed figures of the 1920s or 1930s without thinking of Picasso's neoclassical goddesses and his carefully drawn Rose-period Harlequins. Similarly, it is impossible to look at Beckmann's brooding still lifes of these years without thinking about Braque's gueridons and his smoldering palette of damped-down hues, or to look at Beckmann's voluptuous nudes and costumed women without thinking about Matisse's odalisques. This is why the exhibition "Beckmann and Paris" was conceived.

It is clear that Beckmann's art was deeply informed by the work of the French painters of his generation. He not only learned a great deal from them, but he also measured himself against them, regarding them as both his context and his competition. That he shared many of their heroes and claimed similar lineage is plainly visible in his art. Like the members of the School of Paris, Beckmann discovered Cézanne early on and continued to regard him as a touchstone. Also like them, he was fascinated by Delacroix's dazzling orchestrations of color. The tension between facture and illusion that is at the core of Beckmann's art derives ultimately from Cézanne's disjunctive touches of tonally adjusted pigment, with further inspiration and reassurance coming from Delacroix's brilliant palette, his lush but dry paint handling, and his way of making passages of intense hues all but detach from what they represent.

Throughout his career, Beckmann wished his work to be seen and judged in the context of his French contemporaries. He went first to Paris as an eager student, when he was still in his twenties, came back on his honeymoon, and over the next two decades returned frequently, continuing to long for a connection with French art even as he was becoming increasingly well-known and celebrated as a painter in Germany. By the mid-1920s, Beckmann was near the peak of his fame in his native country, but as his reputation in Germany grew, so apparently did his desire to be recognized internationally, which meant above all recognition in Paris, the undisputed center of the art world of the time. Beckmann's inspirations were the most prominent members of the School of Paris, Braque, Matisse, and Picasso,

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whose success and renown superseded national boundaries. To realize his ambition, from 1925 until 1947, when they left Europe forever, Beckmann and his young second wife, nicknamed "Quappi," spent extended periods in Paris in an effort to establish him as what would now be known in the film business as a player. Recently discovered correspondence with his dealer leaves no doubt about his aspirations.

It didn't work. Beckmann was reasonably successful at entering into Parisian society; he even had a large solo show at the Galerie de la Renaissance in 1931, which Picasso is supposed to have seen and commented on favorably, but he was never accepted as part of (or for the most part even noticed by) the circle of French avant-garde artists. His timing was bad given the political climate of Europe in the 1930s, even though Beckmann, who fled Nazi Germany for the Netherlands in 1937 having been declared a degenerate artist, been dismissed from his teaching position, and had his work removed from exhibition, could hardly have been seen as a supporter of National Socialism. There is also the essential xenophobia of the French to be taken into account and the fact that Beckmann preferred to hobnob with potential patrons at champagne receptions rather than frequent artists' cafés. But even though his contact with the leading members of the School of Paris was limited largely to visiting their exhibitions, Beckmann never stopped thinking of himself as a rightful member of group, convinced that he was their equal in every respect and that his work would stand up admirably to a confrontation with theirs. "If one could only once hang our pictures together so that the people could judge for themselves!," he exclaimed to his dealer.

Now Beckmann's public can at last do just that. "Beckmann and Paris," a collaboration between the Saint Louis Art Museum and the Kunsthaus Zürich, has made it possible for the first time for the artist's paintings from his Paris years to be seen in the company he longed for, placed among works by Braque, Delaunay, Léger, Matisse, Picasso, and Rouault. Some of the relationships suggested by "Beckmann and Paris" are more convincing than others, but the possibilities for comparison the exhibition offers are thought-provoking and illuminating, while the accompanying catalogue contains interesting essays and a great deal of revealing documentary material, some of it completely new. (If you're wondering "Why Saint Louis?" it is because the museum houses one of the finest and largest collections of Beckmann's work anywhere.)

In Zürich, "Beckmann and Paris" was apparently installed as a series of confrontations—Beckmann and Picasso, Beckmann and Matisse, and so on. In Saint Louis, it is organized in thematic sections that compare the ways that Beckmann and his French colleagues approached similar motifs: portraits and nudes, still lifes, urban landscapes and interiors, and vaguely symbolic themes. The exhibition's curators, Cornelia Homburg and Tobia Bezzola, decided to emphasize affinities rather than to document Beckmann's actual (or probable) encounters with specific works by his French counterparts, so they strove not to reassemble pictures that Beckmann was likely to have seen—which might have turned into a demonstration of influence—nor even to limit the selection to works he produced in Paris. Instead, they designed their exhibition to suggest connections and, at the same time, reveal differences, to both support and question Beckmann's own view of the situation. Their aim was not to reconstruct Beckmann's Parisian experience, but to make viewers think about what linked and, perhaps even more important, what separated him from his French colleagues. Whether solely including pictures that Beckmann actually paid attention to would have resulted in a better show is, of course, impossible to say; it might have created a substantially different exhibition and might have demanded the loan of pictures that are all but impossible to borrow. It should be noted that while the Centre Georges Pompidou being closed for repairs must have

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helped to make certain key comparative works available to the present show, the generally high level of the paintings in "Beckmann and Paris" is proof that the curators have notable powers of persuasion.

The exhibition begins with a prologue: a selection of works by Beckmann that set the stage. Some of the principal actors in the story are introduced: a half-length portrait of a girlish but stylish Quappi and a full-length self-portrait of a bullet-headed, dinner-jacket-clad Beckmann on a stairway. The ambiance of Paris in 1920s is invoked by *Paris Society* (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York), a crowded group of figures in evening dress in a harshly lit interior. Begun in 1925, the painting originally catalogued, boldly but recognizably, some of the leading members of the circle in which Beckmann moved on his arrival in the French capital. Reworkings in 1931 and 1947 transformed the society group portrait, which included a German diplomat and his wife, into a jagged pile-up of grotesque, mask-like faces and papery bodies rendered substantial more because of the sheer density of paint than because of Beckmann's broad modelled forms; few of the original figures survive unscathed. (It's not the only picture Beckmann reworked with similar results.) Evidence of aesthetic evolution? Belated influence of the Cubists and the Fauvists? Ironic commentary on his own unrealized ambitions? All of the above?

The introductory section also boasts two outstanding pictures, *Rêve de Paris, Colette, Eiffel Tower* (1931, private collection) and *La Loge* (1928, Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart), both of which, as testimony to the effect Paris had on Beckmann, explain why he wanted to establish himself there. *Rêve de Paris*, in a sense, is a miniature summation of what happened when Beckmann made an effort to "paint French." An oval canvas constructed with clear, overlapping, broad planes, like a Cubist still life, the picture is a compendium of School of Paris references: the Eiffel Tower stands for Delaunay, the domes of the Sacre Coeur for Utrillo, a flying figure for Chagall; what transforms *Réve de Paris* from pastiche to powerful and unignorable picture are its "Beckmann" qualities: the stylized looped-back curtain that dramatizes and flattens the space, and the declarative disc of a boulevardier's walking stick, front and center. It's a little gem.

In contrast to *Rêve de Paris*'s idealized vision of real places, the brooding black and white *La Loge* presents an image of a world of pure artifice: a couple in a theater box, illuminated only by spilled light from the stage. A man in evening dress peers through opera glasses while his female companion, eyes turned into blank dark ovals, gazes out and displays herself. The two are knitted together, flattened, and opposed like figures on a playing card. But just as longer scrutiny reveals a wealth of dark, chromatic colors in this ostensibly black and white canvas—black-browns, somber reds, dull blues, and sharp touches of green—structural complexities also begin to reveal themselves—a counterpoint of scrolling curves and parallel hatchings that creates a fragmented, dislocated space uniting the figures and setting. As is typical of Beckmann, the woman's robustly modelled arms offer yet another kind of spatial distinction without subverting the power of the paint on the surface of the canvas. Wholly Beckmann's own, *La Loge* also makes you think about all of the Impressionists' treatments of similar themes, about Cubist fractured space, about the mature Braque's palette of "non-colors", and more.

Throughout the exhibition, this kind of multiple, provocative reading is demanded. Seeing a group of Beckmann's female portraits beside some of Picasso's brings home their likeness and unlikeness with equal force. Beckmann's Picassoid neoclassicism looks less Picassoid, less classical, more heavy-handed, and more Germanic when the Los Angeles County Museum's *Woman with Blue Veil* (1923) is available to demonstrate just how much more delicate and elegant Picasso's drawing and paint application are than Beckmann's, how much more inflected Picasso's articulation of the figure.

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And Picasso's surrealizing *Nude in a Red Armchair* (1932, Tate Gallery, London) reinforces the Greco-Roman weight and gravitas of Beckmann's images and underlines his reluctance to dissect, reassemble, or reinvent anatomy as Picasso does.

Seeing Matisse's work beside Beckmann's also makes the two artists appear both closely related and radically different. Beckmann shares with Matisse an acute awareness of the dichotomy between the three-dimensionality of the perceivable world and the flatness of paint on canvas, but the two painters express this conflict in quite different ways. Matisse usually does so in terms of unequivocally two-dimensional shapes whose eloquent profiles and placement imply mass by diagramming trajectories through space. Beckmann simply uses two different pictorial languages at once—an equivalent of his being a German-speaking man in a French-speaking city?—flattening out his compositions, compressing and tilting space, and then restoring a sense of mass with aggressively modelled forms.

Matisse on occasion adopts a similar approach, most notably, perhaps, in his *Decorative Figure on an Ornamental Background* (1925–26, Musée national d'art moderne, Paris), that astonishingly robust, rosy female nude seated on a patterned carpet against a wall of florid pink and blue cartouches. (The presence of this iconic picture adds considerable luster to the show.) Despite its aggressive physicality, Matisse's painting is an extraordinarily cerebral, curiously disembodied work. The squared-off figure functions as just one more vaguely rectangular shape among a group that includes the mirror, the cachepot, and the cushion in the corner. The very mass and bulk of the figure are abstract, highly conceptualized properties, as abstract as the two-dimensional expanse of over-scaled patterns; space is carved out mainly by the fierce right angles of the nude's hip and knee. (Something similar happens in Saint Louis's magnificent Matisse of 1908, *Bathers with a Turtle*, in which the monumental seated nude creates space simply by being seated.) By contrast, Beckmann's modelling, no matter how generalized, is never abstract but wholly descriptive. Yet the relentless frontality of the image in Beckmann's best works and the seductive physicality of his painting touch make it impossible to ignore what unites these two painters, however great their differences: their common celebration of the work of art as a brilliantly constructed, sensuous material object.

Some pairings in the show are brilliant. The most unexpected but also one of the most convincing comes at the end, where Beckmann is seen beside Rouault. The emphatic materiality and solemn frontality of Rouault's pictures, like their carnival cum religious imagery, make them look so at home beside Beckmann's works that you wonder why you never thought of the connection before. (Beckmann is supposed, exceptionally, to have said nice things about Rouault; of course, since Rouault was less famous than Matisse or Picasso or Braque, he was no threat, so Beckmann could be generous.) The linking of Rouault's tragic clowns with the haunted sideshow performers of Beckmann's *Artistes* (1948, Thyssen-Bornemisza Foundation, Lugano), or with the ravaged figures of the thinly disguised self-portrait with Quappi, *The King*, (1933–37, Saint Louis Art Museum) reveals remarkable similarities of structure, mood, and temperature. Not surprisingly, these encounters also emphasize the enormous differences between Beckmann and Rouault. The jagged, but sensitively applied, seductive swipes of paint that threaten to engulf Beckmann's surrogate self-portrait and his attendants ultimately have nothing in common with the squashed pats of paint that turn Rouault's clowns into a kind of oversized, crude mosaic.

Other comparisons are more problematic. Any similarity between Léger's pneumatic female forms and Beckmann's nudes seems wholly superficial. Beckmann always celebrated the expressive power of touch, the importance of evidence of the hand. The illusionistic modelling of his figures both

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evokes the weight of flesh and forcibly reminds us of the artist's presence as the manipulator of the paint. Léger, with his machine aesthetic, not only made great efforts to insure that his nudes' carefully shaded tubular forms suggested purely anonymous, mechanically produced objects, but also worked equally hard to erase his own hand from the picture. The comparison of Beckmann with Delaunay raises similar questions. There is some relationship between the composition of an ample, ambitious Delaunay and a pair of large, vertical Beckmanns of athletic subjects hung beside it, but the similarity seems more fortuitous than revealing. Beckmann's relationship with Braque, who is represented by a group of superb still lifes of the 1920s, is more compelling and engaging. Not only are there real likenesses of composition and palette in the tipped, compressed space and smoky, brooding hues of both painters' work, but also both Beckmann and Braque make their delight in paint as a seductive, intensely physical substance an important part of what their pictures are about; their still lifes are as much celebrations of their pleasure in the responsive viscousness of oil paint as they are images of quotidian objects.

Some of the most provocative connections suggested by "Beckmann and Paris" are with pictures that are not in the show. Beckmann's reclining nude *Studio (Olympia)* (1946, Saint Louis Art Museum), at first glance, seems to have links primarily with Picasso's voluptuous nudes of the 1930s and with Matisse's odalisques, but the title immediately requires that you consider another antecedent—Manet's celebrated *Olympia*—which, curiously, enriches Beckmann's picture. The swooping drapery of *Studio (Olympia)* and its matte black ground demand to be read as allusions to the curtain and background of Manet's picture, while Beckmann's grotesque black foreground sculpture, with its truncated, upraised arm, insists on declaring itself as a reversed, perhaps ironic version of Manet's black servant. In the same way, an extraordinary foreshortened Beckmann nude, with the muzzle of a black dog improbably rhymed with the blunt-nosed features of the model, immediately invites comparison with Bonnard's bathers. A Beckmann portrait of a leading French actress of the day, painted in the hope of attracting the attention of fashionable clients, evokes van Dongen more than it does more exalted ancestors. And so on.

In the end, despite the curators' efforts to illustrate a meeting of peers rather than to trace influence, the message of both the exhibition and the catalogue is that Beckmann's challenge to the School of Paris was a one-sided affair, as far as the response of his French counterparts went. But it is also evident from the works in the show that Beckmann was no mere disciple. He may not have gotten any replies to his assertions of parity from the French painters he hoped to join, but from his point of view, he was engaged in a real dialogue with them—which is certainly not the same as simply allowing himself to be influenced. "Beckmann and Paris" is a fascinating show. Not only is it full of wonderful paintings, whatever their relationship, but it can almost make you believe in a Zeitgeist.

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"Three prayers of Telémakhos"
by William Coleman

I.

Father, I know this sea better than my blood.
Each night the waves invade, unattended,
storming this shore ceaselessly, shushing me

with authority I haven't the strength
to oppose. And so I wait. And for what?
So that one night I may spy the glint

of moonlight on your sail and be forgotten?
Years of vigilance and it would come to this.
Better to brave the sea myself, lashing

kelp to driftwood, a makeshift ship to carry
me through another past, more familiar
than my own. Tell me, father, as I go,

who will wait for me to come home?

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II.

This call that ministers to my need—
is it true? Will it follow me now,
out of the harbor and into the night?

I want only you, no adventure or fight,
but you, ready to be shouldered
and brought back to your beginning.

If I give you this voyage, will it suffice?
Or will you need more, a lifetime seeking
what I've never held? My accounts of you

are rendered only from the myth I am heir to.
Still, I sail on, not fearing what I'll find.
It's always been your power to persuade me,

father. But it's mine alone to believe.

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III.

The Hyades riding with the sun bear
omens of seas I'll never sail through.
For all I know, you have returned.

But if my craft did find yours in this storm,
would you recognize me? Would you hoist me
up into your arms? I am too far gone now

to turn back. The same sea that sustains me
wrecks me here without you. I have never known
your counsel, but I beseech it now. This passage

is too terrible to weather alone.
Or maybe you are here already,
for here I have inherited your fate.

I am wanton, I'm at sea, I am home.

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Theater

No business like show business

by Mark Steyn

Back in the Sixties, in his West End play *The Bed-sitting Room*, Spike Milligan liked to capitalize, in a different way each night, on his audience's obligation to stand for the national anthem. So, for one performance, he came on in a diving suit, opened his helmet, put in a comb and tissue paper, closed his helmet and, from inside, played "God Save The Queen." When everyone was on his feet, he popped open his helmet and said, "If you'll stand for that, you'll stand for anything."

No audience, no joke. We're part of the show; we always are—or we should be. At the more ambitious, non-Milligan end of the scale is a moment from Hal Prince's stage production of *Cabaret* that I cited in these pages a few years ago. Joel Grey, as the Kit Kat Klub's emcee, is singing "If You Could See Her Through My Eyes" to a gorilla in a tutu. It's a funny novelty number, and, on the last line, he turns to the audience and gleefully hisses, "If you could see her through my eyes . . . she wouldn't look Jewish at all." We laugh before we realize what we're laughing at—and then we catch our reflections in the slanted mirror above the stage, and the laugh dies in a shaming silence. By conscripting the audience, Prince makes the moment more vivid than it could be in a novel or a film. Perhaps, if you played it to an audience of metaphor-attentive Jewish drama students, you wouldn't get the laugh; perhaps, if you played it to a mob of rabid anti-Semites, you wouldn't get the silence. But Prince knew enough about New York audiences to factor them into the equation.

On such occasions, the paying customers get to confront the theater's central fascinating distinction directly, but it remains true at all times: novels and films are solos, the theater is a duet—and not the reliable synthesis of Nureyev and Fonteyn, but an animal act with an unpredictable poodle. The audience, who can do no more with a movie than receive it indifferently, have the power, if they wish, to demolish a play or (perhaps even more offensive to the author) turn it into something else entirely. Caryl Churchill wrote *Serious Money* as a satirical exposé of Eighties yuppie banking culture, but the play enjoyed a healthy West End run only because it was hijacked by the young traders and dealers whose moral bankruptcy it was intended to expose: faced with a savage indictment of their own worthlessness, they hooted with delight and made the play the preferred group booking for every City banking house. As one critic observed, it was like seeing *The Diary of Anne Frank* with a coach party of SS officers. In New York, where their Wall Street equivalents were apparently more sensitive about their public image, the play flopped.

"Playwriting," Garson Kanin once said, "is a special trick which includes sensing the presence of an audience. All plays take place in the present. Even if they are laid in 1860, the audience sees them at this moment. It is

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happening now, he's kissing her now, he's killing him now, now, now. That's why plays, as a rule, are written in the present tense—and very few novels are written in the present tense."

And they stay in the present tense: he's killing him now, now, now in London—and it works superbly; he's killing him now, now, now ten months later in the New York transfer—and it just dies. All plays take place in the present—whereas a novel's time is contained and the reader steps back into it. I was recently rereading some First World War thrillers by John Buchan, whose views on women, Jews, and foreigners in general are pretty much what you'd expect from a Scot of his generation and background—or rather, I should say, his *characters*' views are what you'd expect.

Let us suppose that Buchan was unusually progressive in these matters: it would still be absurd for him to impart a generalized enlightenment throughout his protagonists. To do so would have been to destabilize his novels far more than an odd aside or insensitive reference does eighty years later. Buchan brings his world alive in brilliant detail—and the reader has to accept, as part of that bargain, that not every detail is pleasant. But I think, if I were adapting *The Thirty-Nine Steps* or *Greenmantle* as a Broadway play, some of those details would get lost on the cutting-room floor: I'd leave out Richard Hannay's curiously single-minded compliments for women—"She moved with the free grace of an athletic boy"—mainly because they'd be taken as what we now call "homoerotic" and provoke titters; other remarks would go because, while they might have been routine in a 1916 novel, in a 1999 theater they'd obtrude—again, he's saying it now, now, now. It seems to me spurious to get rid of an anti-Semitic reference because it might offend, but simply a matter of practical play-making to get rid of it because it might distract.

No one gives more thought to this problem than Broadway producers. If they've got no one to hand who can, in Kanin's phrase, sense the presence of an audience, they'll go and get a focus group. A decade ago, for the musical *Legs Diamond*, audience research indicated the customers would be uncomfortable with a hero who's a murdering mobster. So Legs was transmuted into yet another victim, forced into crime by hard times and the Depression. I don't know whether they took a focus group for *Annie, Get Your Gun* or whether they were just afflicted by modern Broadway's abiding psychosis—the fear of giving offence. At any rate, what's up on stage makes sense only as a kind of deconstructionist existentialist meditation on Irving Berlin's great anthem from the score:

> There's No Business Like Show Business
> Like no business I know
> Everything about it is appealing
> Everything the traffic will allow.

But what exactly will the traffic at the Marquis Theatre allow in 1999? The more they brooded on this point, the less of a sure shot *Annie, Get Your Gun*'s hit title, cracking book, and glorious score all seemed. Yes, Annie Oakley is a strong woman—that's good. But she's hung up on guns—that's bad. Still, the play makes a lot of jokes at the expense of macho men—that's good. But it also makes a lot of jokes at the expense of Injuns—that's bad. So they started tinkering and once they started, they couldn't stop. In Washington a few weeks ago, I asked a friend how the tryout was going. "They've radically overhauled it," he said. "Now the Indians get all the punchlines."

He's not joking—and neither, for the most part, are they. In the original 1946 production with Ethel Merman, "There's No Business . . ." crops up in the middle of the first act sung by Frank, Charlie, and Buffalo Bill. In rehearsal, Richard Rodgers, the show's producer, said, "That's so good you have to let Merman do it." But neither Berlin nor his co-authors, Dorothy and Herbert Fields, could figure out how. After

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all, the point of the song is that the guys are supposed to be teaching her about show business. Eventually, they had the fellows sing it to her, and then Merman said:

> You mean . . . ? *There's no business like show business* . . .

And off she went with the second chorus. It was naïve, it was crude, it was hokey, but it was true to the spirit of the song and the moment and the milieu—the Wild West shows of a century ago. And the audiences loved it: it is, in that sense, the essence of theater—a triumphant vindication of the suspension of disbelief.

In Graciela Daniele's revival, the song is moved forward to become the show's prelude, sung a capella, dreamily and wistfully, by the leading man, Tom Wopat. Then Ron Holgate enters and cranks up the Wild West show's tent. For a moment, I loved it. It appeared to sense the presence of the audience—to understand that we've all heard the tune a million times sawed out as walk-on music for cheesy awards shows and to anticipate our familiarity by paring it back to what it was before its anthemic status was conferred, to the way it must have felt when Irving Berlin wrote it—an evocation of a lost era of sawdust and greasepaint. But then we realize—or, more accurately, it's explained to us—that Tom Wopat is not yet playing Frank Butler and Ron Holgate is not yet playing Buffalo Bill. They're setting up the big top so that they can do *Annie, Get Your Gun* for us as a play-within-a-play.

So much for radical overhauls. If there's a more tired device than the play-within-a-play, I'd like to know what it is. And it hardly ever works—especially when it's used, as it is here, as mere framing. All it does then is emphasize that these aren't people, they're actors pretending to be people. Even then, you could forgive them if they just got on with it and played *Annie, Get Your Gun* as Berlin and the Fieldses wrote it. That's not what Miss Daniele's revival does. The producers, after all, have signed Peter Stone to do a comprehensive rewrite of *Annie, Get Your Gun*, so the crude play-within-a-play effect makes no sense except as an act of desperation. It's one thing to distance yourself from the creaky 1946 script, quite another to distance yourself from your own 1999 script.

Mind you, you can see why. Stone is the head of the Dramatists' Guild—the playwrights' union, as it were—which is a little strange when you consider that he's best known as a play doctor, the guy the producer calls in when the show's in trouble and he's had to get rid of the author. It's a measure of how much trouble Broadway's in that there are now no authors around to get rid of and so Stone gets called in first. He wrote the book for *Titanic*, a show festooned with awards but which limped to its recent closing without making any money. This would appear to be Stone's speciality: uncommercial commercial theater. By his own standards, *Annie, Get Your Gun* is par for the course: on the strength of critical warmth for its star, Bernadette Peters, this *Annie* will probably linger long enough to make it into the next millenium, assuming the Y2K bug doesn't wipe out the telephone bookings, but it's an impostor living off residual affection for the real show. Its story is simple enough—boy sharpshooter meets girl sharpshooter—but along the way, as Stone has been telling interviewers, a few problems emerged—notably what our sensitive times would perceive as anti-feminist bias and a patronizing attitude towards Native Americans, not to mention a robustly unsentimental attitude to birds and beasts: the original script begins with Annie shooting a decorative oiseau off Dolly Tate's chapeau, then striding onstage to claim her kill and proudly displaying the rest of her expertly shot catch: the birds all have one clean hole through the head, so no nasty pellets for diners to break their teeth on. In a wimpsville age when the credits of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* are obliged to declare "No dung beetles were harmed in the making of this film," it's Annie's marksmanship that's more likely to stick in our throat. Or at any

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rate the reviewers' throats: millions and millions of Americans across the fruited plain love killing animals, but few of them are also New York drama critics.

So let us grant the producers a point in hiring Stone. Trouble is, the insensitivities of Dorothy and Herbert Fields in 1946 are as nothing compared to those of Peter Stone in 1999. So now poor old Dolly Tate is the show's designated racist villain, forever trying to bust up the relationship between her younger sister Winnie, who's white, and Tommy, who's half-white, half-Indian, and half-baked. Stone seems to have no other purpose in mind than to find excuses to make favorable observations about Native Americans, and bored theatergoers may like to pass the time trying to decide which line is the most cringe-making. My own nominee is the moment when one paleface, after he's been outwitted by an Injun cunningly disguised in a business suit, marvels: "How the hell did we ever get this country away from them?" Call me old-fashioned, but I find that kind of white liberal guilt-assuagement far more offensive than anything in the 1946 version. If they ever get the country back, I hope Stone's is the first scalp hanging from the teepee. (I know, racist, racist.) But eventually the author exhausts even this pitiful level of inventiveness and is reduced to letting Annie explain, just in case we haven't got it, "Indians are real fine folks."

Stone's so busy being nice to his cigar-store Indians he doesn't seem to notice how offhanded he is with everyone else. Because Dolly Tate is a bigot, he assumes it's okay to do vulgarly misogynist gags about her not getting any sex. Likewise, he has a strange preoccupation with Annie's bosom. I like Bernadette Peters' breasts as much as the next man—actually, probably rather more than the next man given her huge gay following. But there is something terribly sad about seeing Broadway's last great leading lady beached in the middle of this coarse travesty of a vehicle.

Where did the producers go wrong? Well, they went wrong in assuming there was something wrong. There's nothing very much the matter with the original *Annie* and a lot that's right with it. Dorothy and Herbert Fields were originally planning to write the show with Jerome Kern, but Kern died and so they turned to Irving Berlin. He didn't think he could do it: he was a songwriter, not one of these new-fangled "musical dramatists" the so-called "integrated" shows like *Oklahoma!* required. But in Annie Oakley and the Wild West, the Fieldses gave Berlin, for the first time in his life, an environment—and it inspired him to glorious heights. If you were listening to the radio or dancing in nightclubs in 1946, you probably heard some band singer or other doing the big ballad, "They Say That Falling In Love Is Wonderful"—a big pop hit that year. But it's only when you see the show that you realize quite how artful Berlin's being in the song's release: "I can't recall who said it/ I know I never read it." Of course, Annie's never *read* it: she's illiterate. And, ruefully sung by the heroine, the line is suddenly a specific character lyric.

Berlin got to eat his cake and have it: terrific character songs that were also universal pop hits. Sometimes, he outfoxed himself: "The Girl That I Marry" has such a beguiling melody that it, too, made the Hit Parade, even though its lyrical clichés of desirable femininity are intended, in the show, to reveal how mismatched Frank and Annie are. In 1946, when Ray Middleton's Frank sang "The girl that I marry/ Will have to be/ As soft and as pink/ As a nursereeee," there was no chance of Ethel Merman ever meeting that description. Frank's notion of an ideal mate is "a doll I can carry," so, in letting him wind up with Merman, the 1946 show is, in its way, splendidly unconventional: even as he sings the ballad, you know that Annie standing alongside can never meet that description; if love is to find a way, Frank will have to change or even, as we now say, "grow." But half-a-century on, entirely unwittingly, the lyric is an uncannily accurate description of the delicate, vulnerable Miss Peters. Kewpie-cheeked and

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wasp-waisted, she *is* a doll you could carry, and as soft and as pink as a nursereeee, and, even under the boots and buckskins and unconvincing southern twang, you can see a crinolined trophy wife waiting to emerge. Thus, the romance now seems far more routine.

Besides, the accidental connection between song and leading lady in "The Girl That I Marry" subtly underlines what's not happening in the rest of the play, which now wanders off down its own alleys and then has to figure out a way to get back to the song cues. The only number in the score that addresses the question of Native Americans—"I'm An Indian, Too"—has been slung overboard by Stone, presumably lest it offend. Maybe it would, but who knows? Berlin himself kept it in his published songbooks until his death in 1989, and a version of the song made the British pop charts in the early Eighties, which suggests it can't be *that* dated. But then we in the British Empire have a better track record on Indian rights than you Americans so maybe we're just more relaxed about the issue. In 1946, it cropped up when Big Chief Sitting Bull offers to adopt Annie into the Sioux tribe as his daughter and she responds joyfully:

> Like the Seminole, Navajo, Kickapoo
> Like the Cherokee
> I'm an Indian too
> A Sioux ooh-ooh!
> Just like Battle Ax, Hatchet Face, Eagle Nose
> Like those Indians
> A Sioux ooh-ooh!

You can appreciate why the producers had reservations (if you'll forgive the expression). But the song does capture the innocent pleasure children take—or took—in playing as Indians—and let's face it, Sitting Bull did win at Little Big Horn.

How ironic that Irving Berlin, of all people, should fall victim to the suffocating embrace of identity politics. For no one personified better the confidence of this country's common culture. Only he, alone among the greats, could have written without embarrassment: "God bless America/ Land that I love. . . ."

In the long twilight of his life, even Berlin's resumé acquired mythic status, rolling all the clichés of Ellis Island and the Lower East Side into one all-purpose never-to-be Hollywood biotuner: little Izzy Baline from Siberia who saw the Cossacks raze his village; the singing waiter at Nigger Mike's in Chinatown who turned his hand to novelty songs about "Marie From Sunny Italy"; the Tin Pan Alley Jew boy (as George M. Cohan called him fondly) who set his heart on a society bride. Berlin would surely despise the craven foetal crouch of Stone's revisionist *Annie*.

He would also note that, in striking contrast to the tonal consistency of the original, the hypersensitivity of the script is at odds with the blaring coarseness of everything else. Anyone familiar with previous productions by Barry and Fran Weissler will know that they have an unsurpassed knack for tatty roadshow revivals whose bruised sets look as if they've been loaded and unloaded one too many times. But with *Annie* their unfailing bad taste breaks new ground: cluttered sets, garish orchestrations more suited to Atlantic City, and Miss Daniele's and Jeff Calhoun's grab bag choreography. Only when Miss Peters sings her shimmering ballads, "Moonshine Lullaby" and "I Got Lost In His Arms," do we get lost in her arms and the tackiness of the surrounding flimflam falls away: in the tenderness and vulnerability of her voice the show is briefly transported.

There's no business like show business, but it's a business we no longer know. We can only fake it, ever more frantically, like a manic ventriloquist with his hand up a corpse. The theater no longer knows how to sense the presence of the audience, only how to negotiate cautiously the pieties of the age. At least in 1946 they were just, as Annie says, "Doin' What Comes Natur'lly." In 1999, we can, it seems, no longer do it natur'lly.

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Art

An observer of charms & hurts: Dosso of Ferrara

by Creighton Gilbert

The exhibition "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara" comes as a delightful surprise.[1] It is delightful in showing for the first time a marvelous and somewhat eccentric painter. It is a surprise because he has never been on the roster of artists famous enough to be exhibited. To be sure, we do not limit exhibitions to the Picassos, but also do them for the Delaunays, not only for the mass audience of van Gogh but also for the somewhat fewer connoisseurs of Bonnard, who then surprises and pleases a large audience. Yet we rarely extend our appreciation of a Renaissance artist like Titian to the next level of Dosso, whom the Metropolitan's director describes as among the "slightly lesser geniuses." (It's an odd phrase, but we know what he means.) A note on his name: the artist's given name was Giovanni Luteri, but he was known by the nickname Dosso, derived from his birthplace. The doubled Dosso Dossi appears only in the eighteenth century among historians seeking an artificial propriety; it now seems impossible to get rid of.

Two factors favored this exhibition, overcoming the recession of the Italian Renaissance from its nineteenth-century position as favorite into a vague horizon in the twentieth century. One is that Renaissance painting still retains its status as the base for all later western painting, one which museums of broad scope need to include. New ones like the Getty find this hard to do, and their special efforts bring them to artists like Dosso (c. 1486–1542), previously found only on the lists of specialized connoisseurs. The Getty had bought two Dossos (and now a third, lent to the exhibition by a dealer) and was ready to celebrate. The second factor is that cities in Italy still like to celebrate their distant heroes. So the Galleria d'Arte in Ferrara and the Getty worked up this show with commitment and skill. The Metropolitan contributed among other things a very handsome installation.

Pleasure awaits even the unprepared visitor. Dosso's technique is—rarely for his time—"impressionist" in the loose popular sense of showing the brush strokes. Also like the French Impressionists, he loved landscape. His first biographer (Vasari, as for so many) said he was the best of the landscapists in his area, which was actually a bit disapproving of this less noble theme. Of course, Dosso gives first place to figures in narratives, like all painters then. But what is so interesting is that in a few cases his

1 "Dosso Dossi, Court Painter in Renaissance Ferrara" opened at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on January 14, 1999 and was on view until March 28. The exhibition was seen at Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, in Ferrara, Italy (September 26–December 14, 1998), and will travel to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles (April 27–July 11). A catalogue of the exhibition, by Peter Humfrey and Mauro Lucco, has been published by the Metropolitan Museum and is distributed by Harry N. Abrams (328 pages, $65; $40 paper).

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figures do not belong to any definite narrative. This is so contrary to usual ideas of Renaissance painting that scholarly agreement on the point is also remarkable. In the one case here that has won fullest agreement, the catalogue concludes that the picture *Travelers in a Wood* "does not seek to convey any story or message." On the one hand, this has to validate the possibility for other cases of non-narrative painting in the early sixteenth century, which many specialists are reluctant to permit. Yet on the other hand, elsewhere Dosso shows stories and messages that are bizarre or unique, and the chance that one is present in the picture cited must still be held in reserve. A second work where no subject seems possible to assert came to light a few years ago: Mauro Lucco, co-author of this catalogue, reasonably denies that it is Dosso, but then it means that a tradition of this kind emerged from him, which is just as interesting.[2]

Among the most bizarre paintings is *Jupiter, Mercury, and Virtue*, the charming and sunny figure group that *The New York Times*'s reviewer gave the chief place in his review. Of the three figures, the middle one is the classical god Mercury, obvious to Dosso's first viewers. He is shushing a woman on the right, who is pleading for something. Mercury wants to keep her from bothering the left figure, who is absorbed in painting three butterflies on a canvas. The major effort on something so frivolous, along with the high-keyed palette and fluid motion, recalls Fragonard more than the age of Raphael. Luckily, good scholarship explained the story, from a short tale composed by the humanist Leon Battista Alberti but honored in Dosso's time by being wrongly assumed to have been written by the ancient Greek essayist of mockery, Lucian. The pleader is an allegory of Virtue, who has been mistreated by Fortune and everyone else, and hoped great Jupiter would help her. But when she approaches she is repeatedly told that he is too busy, with tasks including the painting of wings on butterflies. When she then tells Mercury her woes, he says she may as well give up.

Everything in Dosso's picture belongs to the story, but he has recast it to fit a single moment, like the adapter of a novel to a one-act play. He also alters Jupiter's activity, which had been to color real wings, plausible for a god in charge of life, to the absurd variant of doing a painting on canvas of butterflies, doubtless because the original act would be too tiny to carry. In doing this, Dosso had the further diversion of showing one butterfly as an outline drawing, one with only part of one wing painted in one color, and the third complete. It is a little lesson in how painting is done, and also satisfies a constant desire of narrative painters at the period to evoke sequential time even if their medium disallowed it.

What then emerges is that this is no light-hearted decoration but concerns desperation and a justified cry for help ignored out of trivial self-centeredness. Without knowing the story, we have lost that level of meaning, but the blend of distress and charm surely worked at the time.

Another painting, called *Witchcraft*, has never been linked to a text, and may have had only a verbal one. The main foreground figure is a heavily muscled man, perhaps Hercules, but shown, as he never is otherwise, with gray hair. He is almost grimly intent on pulling a heavy stone sphere with a rope, a very peculiar test of strength. He is watched by a cluster of people with open amusement: richly dressed young men, women in décolleté, and still other figures further back. The central young man holds a woman's spinning tool, a distaff, certainly referring to another story of Hercules, when he was forced to take this humiliating role by Omphale with whom he was besotted. Now these people jeer at the old hero who is strong no longer.

Both paintings are about small group interaction—as is much Renaissance paint-

2 This work is reproduced as fig. 6 on p. 271 of the book *Dosso's Fate* (Getty Museum, 1998), which assembles talks from two conferences on Dosso, with many valuable new findings.

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ing—but now in a highly special subclass, of those with power mistreating the good weak person, and failing to offer due respect. Dosso was perhaps also the first to paint a theme common in the Baroque, the nymph and satyr. At that time the regular depiction showed a quiet phase, the satyr leaning over the sleeping naked nymph. Dosso's satyr, with the facial features of an ugly animal, is trying to seize the nymph, who turns her ideally classical face to us. It is another form of the violation of the social decencies, ranging from Jupiter's simple self-absorption in painting to this rape. All the violators obtain pleasure.

The Metropolitan's own Dosso, *The Three Ages of Man*, recasts the usual imagery of that subject of three figure groups equal in emphasis. Here the young lovers in a charming meadow are on a much larger scale than the little boys, who peek at them from behind a bush by way of learning how to do it, and then the two old men oblivious to the rest. We are being shown the course of men's lives, first getting ready to make love, then at the focal point, and finally love's absence from the old.

Loss of love is the theme too of Dosso's monumental *Apollo*, named as one of his two masterpieces by the reviewer Francis Haskell. Though *Apollo* is shown in the catalogue, sadly the painting was not lent to the exhibition. It depicts the musician god, raising his fiddle's bow, leaning forward with an intensity of feeling that also is a memory of listening to what he had played. The figure was long thought to be Orpheus, the king of classical musicians, but a background detail of a half-woman-half-tree proved that it is a unique image of Apollo singing a lament after he has lost Daphne. Most images show him running after her and her escape by changing into a tree, as Ovid described with urbane amusement.

Dosso would seem to be comfortable in the literary culture of the Renaissance. (The culture is sketched in Luca D'Ascia's essay in *Dosso's Fate*.) Conventionally Dosso is tied with the most famous Ferrarese poet of the time, Ariosto. But his knights on romantic quests, confounded by enchantresses, joky and amorous, seem somewhat apart from all this. The exhibition material repeats the standard statement that Ariosto includes Dosso's name in a stanza of praise for great artists, Michelangelo and others. But that is not exactly so. Ariosto names "the two Dossi"—Dosso and his brother Battista, agreed by all to be a much lesser artist. Their inclusion may be considered a nice local compliment of a not unusual kind. The catalogue notes that Dosso seems to show Ariostean themes in only two paintings, but in both cases it also notes that the identification is uncertain and competes with others.

One instance is the artists's most famous work (and Haskell's other choice as his best), a grand seated figure once called Circe, but today more often identified as Melissa, a minor enchantress in Ariosto. Yet she does not make the major gesture of Dosso's heroine, the lighting of a torch, and the voodoo-like dolls hanging from a tree are not part of her story. The catalogue rightly concludes that Dosso's heroine should be called anonymous. This is also one of several works that Dosso reworked drastically, wiping out an equally large second figure, which cannot but loosen illustrational reference.

Perhaps the most tantalizing message among these paintings, albeit with every detail clear, is in the Getty's *Allegory of Fortune*. This massive allegorical nude sits down pretty heavily on a kind of transparent balloon, a variation on her usual sphere, which indicates instability. Her companion holds up a big bunch of lottery tickets. They are his tools for mastering fortune, but we may doubt that he will win. Indeed this painting is about volatility, which can well foreshadow disaster. The Duke of Ferrara's sister, the great art buyer Isabella d'Este, favored a bunch of lottery tickets as a decorative motif for her suite, and there must be a connection, but it is far from clear how we go from the device to this serious warning of what is to come.

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The other standard formula about Dosso's context, that he worked primarily for the Duke of Ferrara, has more merit than the one about Ariosto, but it also calls for more qualification than it has had. It is marked in the entrance to the exhibition by a portrait of the duke, a copy of a Titian, and in the catalogue by the longest of the introductory essays. Court records of ducal payments to Dosso indeed abound all through his career, even if most of the references cannot be identified with individual works, lost or otherwise. Yet the duke's most impressive pictorial patronage, a room full of Bacchic myths, was first given to Giovanni Bellini, who produced the great "Feast of the Gods" now in Washington, and then quite intelligently to Titian who did three paintings. The duke then gave one commission to Dosso, while also trying without success to order from Raphael and from the then leading painter of Florence, Fra Bartolommeo. The one trace of this project we can see in the exhibition is part of the relatively small frieze placed near the ceiling, for which Dosso did the whole set. It shows rather straightforward stories from Virgil's *Aeneid*. The duke's prominent hobbies, wood turning, ceramics, and artillery, are hard to link with the thrust of Dosso's paintings.

In contrast to these lesser commissions in Ferrara, Dosso got much more scope at other courts to which he travelled. There were frescoed rooms for the Duke of Urbino (with landscapes and original allegories) and for the Bishop of Trent, a phase of his work inevitably absent here. Sometimes dukes lent their court artists to other dukes, but it might well be that here Dosso took the initiative to get better commissions, just as Leonardo and others were moved to leave their home towns. The Bishop, usually away from Trent, discussed his projects in letters, which give us a rare look into such discussions with an artist, and the only one involving Dosso and a patron. We find the Bishop acknowledging an application for work from Dosso, "the Duke's painter," and later, consulted on themes, informing his assistant in charge that he doesn't want a churchly picture in that spot, but perhaps "some story from Ovid or another, whatever you think is most a propos, I leave it to you and to him."

That sounds like the openness that could have evoked the Dossos we have seen. A similar openness from the Duke of Ferrara could possibly have evoked the most complex, if small scale, set of Dossos we have. He produced nine almond-shaped talking heads (seven survive) to set into a ceiling that was certainly in the duke's private rooms. What they mean is baffling, but we recognize a satyr seizing a nymph, two cases of a youth with a girl while an old man is a bit apart, and two cases of rather troubling lives, a jowly man drinking and women fighting. Perhaps their tone is compensated for by one showing a woman who seems inspired by music, like Apollo and another monumental inventive work in the exhibition, the *Allegory of Music*.

Dosso surely benefited from the visits to Ferrara of artists like Titian and Fra Bartolommeo. In 1517, a year after the latter's visit, Dosso in turn visited Florence and doubtless saw Bartolommeo's latest works. The latter had visited Rome shortly before and had undergone a complete shift in style under Michelangelo's influence. Just before his death, also in 1517, Bartolommeo produced some huge single figures of prophets, obviously in debt to those of the Sistine Chapel. Not long after that, Dosso, back home in Ferrara, produced a rather similar series of very large single figures, male nudes in isolation, sacrificing almost all landscape. Known as *The Learned Men of Classical Antiquity*, these have automatically been called à la Michelangelo, but perhaps their shift to an expert pictorial softness, and their lesser assertiveness, could mean that Dosso saw the Sistine Chapel (which he quite likely had not seen in fact) mediated through Fra Bartolommeo. Dosso's probing variety and depth exploited all kinds of stimuli, but perhaps the strongest were within himself.

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The media

The women come & go

by James Bowman

When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smoothes her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.
—T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

One of the funniest things in that comic treasure-trove, *Monica's Story* by Andrew Morton, is the revelation that T. S. Eliot is *la* Lewinsky's "favorite poet"—indeed, he is referred to therein as "her beloved" T. S. Eliot. Now there's a thought to make the Old Possum sit up in his grave! As a bit of transparently disingenuous image-mongering by the loathsome Morton, hitherto best known as the second-hand biographer of and mouthpiece for the late Princess of Wales, this nugget of information is only surpassed by his tribute to Monica as an angel of mercy to the "homeless man living in a doorway near her hotel to whom she took food and drink every day." With the same purpose, Monica herself told Andrew Golden of the London *Daily Mirror*: "I like to be able to reach up on my bookshelf for one of Shakespeare's plays, and I would like to think that people will do that with this [i.e., Morton's] book."

O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag—
It's so elegant
So intelligent. . .

Talk about the Use of Poetry! And the Use of Criticism!

In fact, "The Love Song of Monica S. Lewinsky"—complete with the proud bourgeois distinction of the middle initial—might seem at first glance to be a subject worthy the attention of an Eliot—and he would certainly have enjoyed the irony of the fact that now, only thirty-four years after his death, "In the room the women come and go,/ Talking of T. S. Eliot" (pronounced after the French fashion).

But Monica has not the self-knowledge of J. Alfred Prufrock. The latter modestly declined the leading role fate might otherwise have thrust upon him. "No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be," he insisted. But none of this "attendant lord" rubbish for Monica. She is ready at the drop of the presidential trousers to leap into the role of poor damaged Ophelia, saved by Prozac and intensive therapy from a premature grave ("When she got back to her apartment, she debated whether to take an overdose of pills or to slit her wrists. She weighed up the options, and then decided to call her therapist."—A. Morton) and returned to the stage. Thereon the nymph proceeds to exploit her imagined pathos for big bucks with the help of the hairdo and the biographer of a wronged princess. And to think that Eliot fancied himself the chronicler of his own age's trifling attempts at vulgarity!

For of course satire is hopelessly inadequate to compass the Monica phenomenon. You might as well take a scalpel to a side of

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beef. In order for satire to work there must be at least some vague, Prufrockian memory of a standard in comparison with which the subject may appear in his or her true, dwarfish proportions. But for most of those who watched the Monica rehabilitation tour last month, there is apparently not even the most exiguous cultural memory of such a standard. If there were they could scarcely have borne to watch. Eliot and Shakespeare are just brand names to us, like a dress from The Gap. Modern literary scholarship having succeeded in rendering their works all but unintelligible, these poets are now only useful for their names and images, which will live on to adorn baseball caps, T-shirts, shopping bags, movies, and bimbo biographies. "Monica is 25. Her turn-ons are power and cigars. Her turn-offs are meanies and independent counsels. Her favorite TV shows are 'The Nanny' and 'Touched by an Angel,' and her favorite reading is T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare."

Did I say bimbo-biographies? Naturally I meant to include in the term presidential biographies, since Monica's erstwhile paramour has been the recipient of many similar tributes to his literary acumen. One of my favorite passages in David Maraniss's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of 1995, *First in His Class: The Biography of Bill Clinton*, describes a visit by the future president when he was at Oxford to a production of *King Lear* at Stratford. After the play, Bill chatters about it to a friend, "relating it to his life in different ways."

> He told [Darryl] Gless that he was moved by the scene in Act III when Lear is turned out of Gloucester Castle onto the heath and takes shelter in a hovel where he encounters the poor for the first time. "That scene," Gless recalled later, "prompted Bill to talk about his eagerness to go back to Arkansas—to give something back to the place that gave him opportunities that his family could not have bought."

Maraniss himself appears to find nothing extraordinary or comic in Clinton's combination of arrogance, naïveté, and self-centeredness here—as if Lear's tragedy were nothing but a commentary on and encouragement to what his friend Gless calls "his aspirations"—so it is hardly surprising that the same qualities so prominently on display in his former Oval Office plaything are barely noticed. As Monica said to Michael Duffy of *Time* magazine when he asked her if her experience of the past year had been "just about a broken heart" or "about history"—"I'm not going to pretend that it was always about something bigger than me. Because, for me, it wasn't. For me, I was the one lying awake at night crying, scared I was going to go to jail. I was the one being followed. I was the one being torn apart in the press, and my family. . . ."

In other words, there *is* nothing "bigger than me"—*my* feelings, *my* fears, *my* desires. Such an attitude was perfectly consistent with her performance in the interview with Barbara Walters on a special, two-hour jumbo-extravaganza edition of "20/20" on ABC. But nobody seemed to notice or care very much, because such self-conceit is the very *raison d'être* of a show like "20/20" and of celebrity journalism (but I repeat myself) in general. One could scarcely imagine that Barbara would have known what to do if her subject *had* shown any signs of genuine remorse or humility. For the witness of the television camera itself almost precludes the existence of any such sign, TV-tears always being major money-earners for those who know how to generate them. Television can present to our hyperstimulated sensitivities an endless procession of victims, but not one genuine penitent.

Moreover, the victim-parade makes it more and more difficult to tell the difference between genuine victims and manufactured ones like Monica Lewinsky. Was it Leno or Letterman who originally made the joke about President Clinton's having gone *Wag the Dog* one better by distracting attention from a sex scandal with another sex scandal? At any rate, the joke is now too true to be funny anymore, just as the scandals are too

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familiar to be scandalous anymore. Now we have seen that even a credible accusation of rape against the president, in Lisa Meyer's long-delayed interview with Juanita Broaddrick, was a one-day wonder in the press. To the media, the news that Clinton has often been guilty of sexual misbehavior is no news. Therefore it scarcely matters how great the degree of sexual misbehavior he may now be charged with. Lesson to future presidents: if you're going to sin, sin big and sin often.

For we have learned that once a scandal has been unpacked and assembled by the media, as both the Monica and the O. J. stories were, you can't put it back in the smaller box of the legal system. That is why both cases were resolved by jury nullification which, though deplorable, has at least this excuse: that by the time a verdict was required of the respective juries it had become impossible to render one that was not, implicitly, a political act, because of what the media had already done with the story. Meanwhile, the media scandal-mongers had grown weary of their own creation, bored and ready to "move on"—a feeling naturally most welcome to any subject of scandal, such as O. J. and Bill Clinton, with the tenacity and the utter shamelessness necessary to have held on up until that point.

It was doubtless such scandal-weariness which caused the rest of the press to miss the delicious irony caught by *The Washington Times* in its front-page juxtaposition of Mrs. Broaddrick's allegation, which it was one of the few non-tabloids to splash, and a headline that read: "Clinton urges GOP to let go of anger from his trial." The article (by Andrew Cain) quotes the president as saying, at a joint news conference with Jerry Rawlings, one time dictator and now president of Ghana, that

> If we focus on the American people and doing our duty and not on whether we're mad or happy, disappointed or elated about the events of the last year, then all this in the course of time will work itself out, and the American system will be validated. . . . It is simply wrong for you to think about what your feelings are. Your responsibility is to fulfill your oath and do what the public needs, and if we focus on that, we'll be just fine.

The breathtaking chutzpah of such a statement is admittedly less newsworthy than it would have been a year ago, when we were only beginning to test the apparent limitlessness of Clinton's self-absorption, but it is still at least as newsworthy, in the estimation of some the wisest heads in the media, as the rape story, even if neither made the front page in most other papers. The alleged rape, in fact, was almost instantly converted into a media story, since NBC sat on the interview with Mrs. Broaddrick for over a month, ostensibly for further checking, airing it only after the impeachment trial was over and Dorothy Rabinowitz had run an account of her own interview with the putative victim in *The Wall Street Journal*.

At this point, *The Washington Post* jumped in with a story by Lois Romano and Peter Baker headed: "'Jane Doe No. 5' Goes Public With Allegation." That is to say, the story was now not: "Clinton Accused of Rape" but the fact that his accuser, whom everybody already knew about as "Jane Doe Number 5," had at last been given a forum in the respectable media for making her claim. Likewise, the subhead to the Romano/Baker story was: "Clinton Controversy Lingers Over Nursing Home Owner's Disputed 1978 Story." It wasn't enough just to note the "Controversy." The redundant "Disputed" makes it emphatic that the *Post* wants to be seen as holding this story at the end of a very long stick. On an inside page, Howard Kurtz, the *Post*'s media reporter, further reinforced the obligatory impression that this was a media story: "A Long-Simmering Story Explodes Into the Mainstream."

Of course the irony was that the paper's careful treatment, in common with that of the rest of the non-Clinton-hating media, ensured that the story did not "explode" at

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all. It sat up, made a little peeping noise, and was instantly forgotten. Or rather, its substance was instantly submerged in the general discussion of it as a media story ("On Tortuous Route, Sexual Assault Accusation Against Clinton Resurfaces," *The New York Times* reported five days later, on the day that NBC got around to airing the Lisa Meyers interview). Even after Mrs. Broaddrick had appeared on national television, *The Washington Post* continued to report on the matter only in the context of the press treatment of it in general and its own initial report in particular.

For example, on the following Sunday (February 28), not one but two of the media's designated worriers, Tom Rosenstiel (Director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism of the Pew Charitable Trust) and Bill Kovach (Curator of the Nieman Foundation for Journalism at Harvard), put in an appearance in the "Outlook" section to scold not the president but those who reported his alleged misdeeds.

> What are we to make not only of Jane Doe No. 5, but also of how and when she became a story? The circuitous tale is a template for what might be called the New Mixed Media Culture, and it is a sign of things to come —bad things for the nature of public discourse. We are moving toward a journalism of assertion rather than a journalism of verification, and the cost for society is high.

What a laugh! When the scandals were Republican ones, allegations and assertions were rushed into print without delay—as David Frum in *The Weekly Standard* reminded us they were in the case of the claims made against Clarence Thomas by Anita Hill—and verification was left to find its own way, halting behind. Now the press sits on a story for months, delaying it until it can no longer affect the outcome of the impeachment trial of a Democratic president, and these journalistic watchdogs complain that the naughty fringe elements in the new media are being precipitate!

In fact, the treatment of this story is a good illustration of just how much power the mainstream media still has, in spite of all the hand wringing about Matt Drudge and other naughty-boy journalists who bypass the traditional "gate-keepers." It lies in the power, such as it is, of media criticism, which (fortunately for me) a lot of people are still inclined to take seriously. As if the Rosenstiel/Kovach scolding were not enough, on another page, the *Post*'s new ombudsperson, E. R. Shipp, was brought forward to do the worrying for the staff, quoting criticisms of the paper for even reporting as much as it did by a number of Clinton apologists. Ms. Shipp concluded that the *Post*'s unique "role" in the world required "a greater exercise in news judgment than was evident in the 'Jane Doe No. 5' episode." In other words, it should have shut its eyes completely to an accusation of rape lodged against the President of the United States. This is what the new media culture considers responsible journalism.

I noticed at the beginning of the Monica scandal last year that for every ten scandal stories there was approximately one hand-wringing account of the media's reporting of them. The latter was intended as a sort of sacrifice to the savage god of public opinion, but its real purpose, like so much of what the media do, was self-congratulation. Now with the advent of the Juanita Broaddrick story, this ratio appears to have been reversed. Now for every scandal story there are ten commentaries taking the media to task for reporting it. Or expressing the media's dissatisfaction at *having* to report it. On the same day that Messrs Rosenstiel and Kovach and Mme Shipp were solemnly holding forth in *The Washington Post*, a scandal-fatigued Francis X. Clines wrote in *The New York Times* "Week in Review" that "The End Was a Mirage. The Scandal Lives On."

> Mercifully, the impeachment vote was at hand, acquittal was already a certainty, and that new thing with feathers, "closure," seemed a cheery possibility for the nation. Yet

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> in the final hours of the Senate's trial of President Clinton, Republicans were still proposing more subjects for investigation. . . .
>
> Whether it be set in Oliver Stone's Amerika or the Marx Brothers' Freedonia, the very idea of remilking the mass entertainment aspect of the debilitating Clinton-Lewinsky-Starr saga seemed the year's ultimate obscenity. For, as the Senate prepared to vote, a stake-in-the-heart ending of the thing was at hand by all the constitution's sacred writ and the public's smoldering indifference.
>
> But no. Less than two weeks after his acquittal, President Clinton once more has had to gingerly decline elaboration on his latest flat denial of a Jane Doe story of sexual allegation flaring up from the oily residue of his impeachment struggle.

Let's see if we've got this right: Juanita Broaddrick's charge of rape and those inclined to bring it into the public eye are deserving of no consideration, are indeed guilty of the "ultimate obscenity" (the mind boggles!), because Francis X. Clines, modestly speaking on behalf of "the public" is tired of stories about Clinton sex-scandals? Of course the "smoldering indifference" referred to here was on display for all to see three days later when seventy million people tuned into "20/20," but the media were looking, as they have not infrequently done over the last six years, for excuses to lay off Clinton with a positively Monican regard for the importance of their own feelings.

But perhaps even a better example of journalistic blindness born of journalistic self-importance was to be found in *The New York Times*'s editorial about Mrs. Broaddrick. The *Times* editorial page, having learned to be fitfully critical of Clinton in the last two or three years, scurried back into his corner during the impeachment debates. Now it wrote pompously that "No one will ever know the complete truth about Juanita Broaddrick's allegation that Bill Clinton raped her in 1978"—which is like saying that no one will ever know the complete truth about the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman. In other words, it is true but utterly beside the point.

The point is that what we have very good reasons for supposing is quite as peremptory in the demands it makes on our attention as that inaccessible, not to say mythical, "complete truth" would be. But with the *Times*'s usual pious hopefulness, the editorialist went on to write that "There is no legal or constitutional remedy for the situation"—presumably since a second impeachment is not even imaginable. Still, all is not lost, for "surely there is a limit to how long Mr. Clinton can speak through his lawyer on these matters and more broadly restrict his exchanges with the press to brief, carefully choreographed events and joint appearances with foreign visitors instead of open-ended Presidential news conferences."

Why should there be a limit to these practices? The editorialist offers the no-comment presidency only the sanction of making its incumbent "oddly isolated from the people he leads." There's a threat to make him tremble! And even though the *Times* was troubled by the accusation of rape, and thought that "it would be nice" if Clinton denied it in person, it quickly skipped over it to "the larger need for Mr. Clinton to re-establish communication with the nation after a traumatic year." The editorialist agreed with David Gergen that "The President should have a reflective conversation with someone on television and really talk about where he is in life, what his aspirations are, talk about his past, try to help us sort this out."

There once again and unmistakably speaks the self-importance of the media. The little matter of an alleged rape is certainly a problem, but it is really only a part of the "larger" problem of the president's not making himself accessible enough to the media! Even I am surprised, sometimes, by the Himalayan proportions of the American journalist's self-conceit, which is almost as impressive in its way as Miss Lewinsky's and the reason that it is so largely invisible to both.

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Fiction chronicle

Illustrations of inertia & compromise

by Brooke Allen

From James to Conrad to Forster, the loaded and fateful moral choice has always been the centerpiece of the modern novel. Sometimes, as in *Lord Jim*, the moment of choice is discrete and fleeting; Jim's spontaneous flight from the wreck of the *Patna* is a decision that can never be retracted, and one that will define him—at least to himself—for the rest of his life. Often, though, and this is usually the case in real life, there is not one dramatically wrong choice but a whole serious of squalidly ignoble ones, until the young idealist turns, without having any sense of just where, exactly, he went wrong, into the middle-aged cynic.

This process of moral corruption happens to one degree or another to everyone on earth. It happens to entire generations, with the Sixties advocates of peace, love, and understanding become the Wall Street barons and advertising executives of the Nineties, and even to whole peoples, as Vichy France so horribly proved. Three recent English novels, all received with acclaim in Great Britain, attempt to describe this slow rot.

"*Talking 'bout my generation*," Ian McEwan quotes maliciously in his new novel *Amsterdam*.[1] And in *Amsterdam*, McEwan, born in 1948, is capable of summing up his own generation with cruel brilliance.

> He looked around at his fellow mourners now, many of them his own age, Molly's age, to within a year or two. How prosperous, how influential, how they had flourished under a government they had despised for almost seventeen years. *Talking 'bout my generation*. Such energy, such luck. Nurtured in the postwar settlement with the state's own milk and juice, and then sustained by their parents' tentative, innocent prosperity, to come of age in full employment, new universities, bright paperback books, the Augustan age of rock and roll, affordable ideals. When the ladder crumbled behind them, when the state withdrew her tit and became a scold, they were already safe, they consolidated and settled down to forming this or that taste, opinion, fortunes.

The young idealists of thirty years ago have become exactly the sort of adult they would most have despised. It is a sad but familiar story, almost a cliché, and McEwan injects an even darker tone by hinting that perhaps even the young and the ardent are already innately corrupt.

McEwan focuses his story on two particular members of his generation, the closest of friends—or so they think, anyway—since their university days. Clive Linley is a renowned composer, scorned by avant-garde purists but generally thought to be one of England's best. In his own not so humble opinion Clive was "Vaughan Williams's heir, and considered terms like *conservative* irrelevant." Clive has contrived to

1 *Amsterdam*, by Ian McEwan; Doubleday, 193 pages, $21.

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remain unmarried; he has a girlfriend, but she lives in America and hence is reserved only for special occasions, leaving him the requisite solitude for pure artistic endeavor. Clive sees his life as rich, full, and uncompromising. If he is successful, it is by virtue of his merit alone, and not through unseemly pandering to popular tastes.

Vernon Halliday, on the other hand, is necessarily a slave to the vulgar demands of the marketplace, and has developed a slave's mentality. He is the editor of a large daily newspaper, but it is the publisher, not he, who holds power, and to keep his job Vernon must prove himself by boosting sales with increasingly trashy and sensationalist stories. He has ended up with exactly the reputation he deserves: "He was widely known as a man without edges, without faults or virtues, as a man who did not fully exist. Within his profession Vernon was revered as a nonentity."

Vernon and Clive run into each other at the funeral of Molly Lane, a former lover of them both whose recent illness and death has thrown them into a jitter over their own mortality. Each is disturbed by unexplained physical symptoms: Vernon by a feeling that his right hemisphere and the entire right side of his head is dead, Clive by numbness in his left hand. In a momentary panic, the two men agree that if one of them should ever be hopelessly incapacitated, the other will pull the plug.

But soon after this uncharacteristic gesture of mutual dependence and trust, or perhaps even because of it, they lapse into a bitter argument. At issue are some pictures that have come into Vernon's possession: shots of Julian Garmony, the right-wing Foreign Secretary and another of Molly's boyfriends, in drag. Vernon, of course, itches to publish, while Clive urges him not to, each man trying to turn what is in essence an acrimonious personal squabble into a moral contest. Vernon says that if the shots are published Garmony will be laughed out of office, and a good thing too, otherwise he will probably be the next prime minister: "Another five years. There'll be even more people living below the poverty line, more people in prison, more homeless, more crime, more riots like last year." But Clive stands by his principles. They are both children of their times, aren't they, and therefore agree that there is no moral onus attached to transvestitism? "If it's okay to be a transvestite, then it's okay for a racist to be one. What's not okay is to be a racist." The two men part in rage, each to his own particular hell: Vernon to the newspaper's editorial meetings, hilariously rendered by McEwan, Clive to solitary and tortured composition.

For Clive has been chosen for the high official honor of composing the so-called Millennial Symphony, picked above all competitors because the commissioning committee "longed for a symphony from which could be distilled at least one tune, a hymn, an elegy for the maligned and departed century"; and Clive, as even his detractors are compelled to admit, "along with Schubert and McCartney, could write a melody."

In creating the initial movement, Clive goes great guns. He even allowed himself

> a passing thought, the minuscule fragment of a suspicion that he would not have shared with a single person in the world, would not even have committed to his journal, and whose key word he shaped in his mind only with reluctance; the thought was, quite simply, that it might not be going too far to say that he was a genius.

But when it comes to the all-important melody, Clive is for the first time in his career at a loss. And as he struggles to bring the elusive tune to birth, Clive, like the more obviously degraded Vernon, is finally forced to confront not only his truly awful personal sins but—and to him this is every bit as painful—his professional mediocrity, too.

McEwan's characters are magnificently petty, and their author brings them to life with all his usual skill and panache, his marvelous combination of severity and human-

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ity, for three-quarters of the novel. But at that point he suddenly comes close to ruining it all with a smart, synthetic ending that makes Clive and Vernon seem as cartoonish as they had hitherto been true. The result is that the book is flawed, perhaps fatally so. It nevertheless was awarded the 1998 Booker Prize, rather surprising in the face of fierce competition from Pat Barker. Possibly McEwan was simply deemed overdue to win the award, which is certainly the case: he is one of the very finest writers in England today, far worthier than most of the Prize's recent recipients. But *Amsterdam*, strong as it is in so many ways, is not the work that should have earned it.

With his dark and gruesome first novel *The Last King of Scotland*,[2] the young British author Giles Foden has created a complex picture of one man's corruption, corruption in the form not of an ignoble act but of an ignoble failure to act. Like Germany under Hitler, Uganda under Idi Amin was a country of unimaginable horror and bloodlust, eerily like Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Why did so many people who were in a position to resist Amin fail to do so? Why, for that matter, did the international community allow him to hold on to power for so long? The question seems unanswerable; Foden's thoughtful novel, though, hazards a guess.

It is 1971 and Nicholas Garrigan, a recent graduate of the medical school at the University of Edinburgh, has arrived in Uganda to work as a Ministry of Health doctor in a bush station. He has left home under a cloud; his father, a strict Presbyterian minister, had hoped that he would stay and practice in their native village of Fossiemuir. Nicholas arrives in Kampala on the very day that Major General Idi Amin and the country's armed forces seizes power from Milton Obote, a putsch condoned and supported by the Western powers made nervous by Obote's pro-Russian leanings. As the novel opens, riots and skirmishes are breaking out all over the country.

Nicholas's mettle is tested almost immediately, as he travels up-country in a crowded *matatu*, or bush taxi, and a marauding soldier holds up the vehicle and brutalizes one of the passengers, a visiting Kenyan. Nicholas, as the sole *mzungu* (white man), could probably have safely spoken up for the Kenyan, but he chickens out. His failure to act, unfortunately, indicates the course his life will take throughout his residence in the country.

A couple of years after his arrival in Uganda, Nicholas by a fluke happens to be on the scene when Amin is slightly injured in a car accident, and he is brought in to attend to the wound. The dictator takes a shine to the young man, partly because Amin perversely insists on identifying Uganda with Scotland—both long-suffering victims, as he sees it, of British imperialism—and invites him to Kampala to become his personal physician. Thus Nicholas finds himself at Amin's side as the infamous reign of terror begins.

Like Hitler, Amin has a sick charisma, and Nicholas finds him hard to resist. "My life had already fallen into a pattern that concentrated on Amin," he recalls. "The closer I got to him, the fewer my illusions about him—and still I stayed, more fascinated than frightened." Nicholas's closeness to Amin could make him uniquely useful to the latter's enemies, and before long he is approached by the intelligence man at the British High Commission, who asks him to administer tranquilizers to the tyrant. A not unreasonable request: but Nicholas, or so he claims, is "shocked." Later, as Amin's madness intensifies, the British go further and ask the doctor to kill him outright. Again he professes shock: "Doctors don't do that sort of thing. We take an oath, you know."

> "I'm just doing a simple job," I said. "I'm not getting in anyone's way."
>
> "Well, you should be getting in the way. You should be getting in the way of the kill-

2 *The Last King of Scotland*, by Giles Foden; Alfred A. Knopf, 336 pages, $25.

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> ings. The PM says that he must be stopped. It's atrocious what's happening. Law and order have collapsed, people are disappearing every day. We keep getting reports of massacres of soldiers, they're dumping the bodies in the lake or in mass graves in the forests. It's like Hitler."
>
> "You're exaggerating," I said, irritably. "Nothing is like Hitler."

That statement is untrue, of course; there have been other Hitlers before, and no doubt still more will rise to power in the future. They are inevitably abetted—or "enabled," as the current jargon has it—by lackeys like Nicholas Garrigan, whose failure to intervene, Foden implies, is not due to the understandable impulses of apathy or fear, but to a positive, if hardly conscious, impulse of rage. A dream of Nicholas's foreshadows his complicity: in it, he witnesses "a horrible, Godzilla-like encounter between a cricket and bullfrog—the sawbones legs of the one, the glaucous eye and long tongue of the other. Where I was in it, spectator or actor, I didn't know, I couldn't tell."

Foden has created a genuinely interesting character in Nicholas, a man almost entirely unadmirable but for whom the author nevertheless retains a certain affection. He doesn't fall into the easy trap of blaming Nicholas's chilly character on his environment, although that environment certainly had a share in forming his largely negative precepts and values: his father, for instance, taught him that the most important thing in life is to minimize the harm done to others (as opposed to giving him the more positive injunction to actively help others). Back in Scotland, after his final and humiliating departure from Uganda, Nicholas is at last able to confront what he is. "Not once, I thought, have you snatched anything glorious or courageous from the world as it passed you by."

Sebastian Faulks's 1996 *Birdsong* was a strong, evocative novel about World War I, very obviously in the tradition of Siegfried Sassoon. The battle scenes were really powerful; the book as a whole, though, was marred by a silly modern section in which the protagonist's granddaughter "discovers" World War I and wonders why no one had ever told her how dreadful it was. (The reader, on the other hand, wonders just what planet she has been on all her life.) Now Faulks has published a World War II novel, *Charlotte Gray*, that traces the roots of the second Great War in the first.[3]

On most levels *Charlotte Gray* is little more than a highfalutin romance novel and can't compare with *Birdsong*. Not that it isn't fun to read: much of it deals with the French resistance, and for those of us who like that sort of thing, anything about the resistance is thrilling by definition. But the characters are lifeless stereotypes: Peter Gregory, the sexy, bitter RAF officer who has seen too many friends die and who disappears on a mission over Vichy France; Charlotte, the ardent heroine, ready to face any danger as she searches France for her man; Julien Levade, the charming and idealistic young resistance fighter who secretly loves the intrepid Charlotte.

To sum up the plot briefly: Charlotte Gray is a reserved young woman from Scotland, secretly haunted by some traumatic childhood event that she can't fully remember, but which has to do with her father. (No, it's not sexual abuse; that's one cliché Faulks doesn't sink to.) She moves to London, where she meets Peter Gregory, the tortured RAF man, and falls in love. He goes on a flying mission to France, and mysteriously disappears. Charlotte, who was educated in France and can pass for French at a pinch, joins the resistance and heads for the continent. In a vague way she identifies the plight of her beloved France, its fatal lack of direction, with her own.

> She thought of France under darkness. It was hard to imagine how this country which in her first visits was still so harrowingly proud

3 *Charlotte Gray: A Novel*, by Sebastian Faulks; Random House, 432 pages, $24.95.

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> of itself, intoning the word "Verdun" like a muttered prayer, could so utterly have lost the thread that connected it to the innocent glory of Rheims and Proust's Combray and Louveciennes, the village the Impressionist painters had made seem essential. There was this sense, on a grand scale, of national breakdown, and next to it was the loss of continuity in her own small life. She felt that the outcome of the one depended on the other; that only if France could find itself again could she hope to reconnect her own future to the lost happiness of her past.

Charlotte is not especially interesting, and neither are any of the other characters. But *Charlotte Gray* rises somewhat above the level of the standard romance thriller in its treatment of France and of its role in the war. Like many writers and historians, Faulks traces the fact of the country's ready capitulation back to the near-mortal blows it endured during the First World War, and in this novel he gives its moral failure a human face: that of Marshal Pétain the man who in World War I was a symbol of French valor and pride, in World War II a symbol of her utter defeat and abasement. The image of the French resistance that has come down to us is a simplistic one of gallant patriots risking torture and death, helped and supported by their equally zealous countrymen. The real story was far more complex, and Faulks manages to work this subject very neatly into his story. The resistance fighters, for one thing, hardly had the support of the general population; in fact they were often feared and hated, for the country could not, during the years in which the novel is set (1942 and early 1943) really believe that Germany would not prevail. The French were looking ahead to a postwar Europe in which France as well as most other nations would be client-states of Germany, and they intended that France should be number one among these states.

The British, too, were planning for the future, the difference being that their government was expecting an eventual Allied victory. As a Foreign Office man in the novel puts it, "Like the French, we have to think of the likely configuration of Europe after the war. We want to be the first country in the new Europe, albeit with some American support." Faulks therefore shows the British administration supporting and sponsoring resistance efforts on their terms, but when the tide begins to turn —when the people of France start to change their minds about the probable outcome of the war and the new, Gaullist resistance groups swing into action—we see perfidious Albion sabotaging their work so as to keep the resistance movement firmly under British control. For Whitehall it is mere power play; for the French, it is a contest for their nation's soul. As Julien Levade puts it, "This is a civil war as well as a national war; it is a fight for influence and for possession of history."

Only mildly interesting as a work of literature, *Charlotte Gray* nevertheless succeeds in getting across one of Faulks's central contentions: that "a chain of compromise and inertia, at no single point perceptible as choice in moral colors, had had in the end a cumulative effect." The results of such compromise and inertia are every bit as evil as those of more obvious acts of malice or violence, a lesson that the history of the past century has definitively proved, and that each of the three authors discussed here illustrates in his own particular way.

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Books

New prose for old

by Joseph Epstein

In Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Prose* (1925), there is a one-paragraph selection by Arthur Clutton-Brock arguing that the cardinal virtue of poetry is love and that of prose justice. Poetry, I take Clutton-Brock at least in part to be saying, is for affirmation and asseveration, for emotion heightened, heated, even hyperbolic; prose is for calm explanation and cool elucidation, for, above all, the measured perfection of expression that goes under the name of precision.

For the editor of an anthology of English prose, the more pertinent point is that the beauty of poetry is more easily grasped in brief examples, whereas that of prose is generally available only in lengthy passages. Cogitating upon this point, Quiller-Couch asks: "Can any anthology of short passages rightly illustrate an art of which the property is to be long?" It's a good question, and implicit in it is the larger question of what is the use of a collection of English prose whose organizing principle is not stories, essays, or any other single form but prose per se: what is the use of a book, essentially, of sentences whose only true justification is their intrinsic quality as language—language beautifully, powerfully, amusingly or otherwise interestingly deployed, but finally sentences merely?

Arthur Quiller-Couch's *Oxford Book of English Prose* differs substantially from John Gross's recent *New Oxford Book of English Prose*[1] in two serious ways: the first is that Quiller-Couch's volume is weighted heavily in favor of English writers, whereas Mr. Gross opens his pages to all writers of English. Each editor has done so by design. "I have tried to make this book as representatively English as I might," Quiller-Couch wrote. He printed only fifteen American writers—Irving, Emerson, Thoreau, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., the usual nineteenth-century suspects—next to 320 English writers. John Gross has greatly internationalized his anthology, making it truly Anglophone, including not only many Americans but also East Indians, Africans, Australians, a few Caribbeans, and one Russian—a chap with a butterfly net calling himself Nabokov—who may have been the most felicitous modern English prose stylist of all. "I hope that the present anthology is reasonably international in outlook," John Gross writes, adding "but I would be disappointed if it wasn't also regarded as unmistakably British in origin."

The other way in which the two volumes differ is that John Gross's is more heavily weighted—I refer to pure poundage—and this, in my view, is not necessarily in its favor. The first *Oxford Book of English Prose* is short, solid, and stout, resembling the books of Edmund Wilson (books that were shaped, come to think of it, rather like Wil-

1 *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*, edited by John Gross; Oxford University Press, 1028 pages, $39.95.

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son himself). *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*, the same size as *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* and *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, gives the more leadenly feeling of a tome. The Quiller-Couch book provides the happy illusion that one might toss it into a suitcase for reading while traveling, or slip it into the ample pocket of an outer-coat; the John Gross book, even though it has, as we should (regrettably) say nowadays, a "reader-friendly" dustjacket and is happily bereft of the barbed-wire feel that elaborate scholarly apparatus sometimes bestows, has a heft that makes for unportability. Pity, for the book, solid but never stolid, is, in the best sense, light in spirit and buoyant in content.

Lest I violate the truth-in-advertising laws, I had better go no further before announcing that John Gross is my friend, which has not in the least got in the way of his being someone whose work I continue to admire. He is a writer, as he is a friend, of exquisite tact; subtle, amusing, informative, a man of great charm who doesn't require more than the normal allotment of oxygen in any room he enters. He also happens to be immensely knowledgeable, which is merely another way of saying wonderfully —perhaps it does not go too far to say astonishingly—well read, especially in English literature. Whereas a decently well-read person has read the first line of good books (as deep down, say, as Trollope and Aldous Huxley and Lytton Strachey), a rather better-read person (myself, actually) goes further down (to, say, Goncharov and Firbank and Lord Berners). John Gross's reading goes yet a third lever deeper—and I should be delighted to provide the names of three writers here if only I knew them. As befits a former editor of the London *Times Literary Supplement* (which he was from 1974–1981), he appears to have read and taken the measure of just about everything of any seriousness written in English.

John Gross is also a writer and editor with a nice sense of subject. The latter is on display in two of his books: *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (1969; rev. ed. 1991), a study of the now dying tradition of literary workers who earn their living outside the university and of whom he is himself indubitably one; and *Shylock* (1992), a history of the performance of that great and controversial role written with the aim of arriving at the playwright's true intentions in creating the character. He can be instructive and persuasive on subjects both heavy (Hitler and the Holocaust) and light (popular music). If his prose has a dominant tone, it is one of companionable suavity, in which he never preaches, scolds, explains, or talks down in any way, but instead, in the course of providing high intellectual entertainment, occasionally reminds his readers of fundamental or learned or amusing things they just may have forgot, without for a moment suggesting we may, poor dear idiots, never have heard of them in the first place.

All these qualities have helped make John Gross an editor of literary reference works and an anthologist of the highest quality. I have long owned, and taken great pleasure in, his *Oxford Book of Aphorisms*, and am unashamedly proud to be among the contributors to his *Oxford Book of Essays*. *The New Oxford Book of English Prose* is, characteristically, a rich and valuable work, and it is quite impossible to think of anyone else in our day editing such a volume with the same easy aplomb, splendid range, and winning touch.

The New Oxford Book of English Prose contains nearly every category of prose: fiction along with nonfiction, English translations of the Bible, letters, entries from journals, but no prose from plays excepting Shakespeare, from whose plays four pages of prose-like dialogue have been extracted, an exception with which no one is likely to wish to argue. (What one does wish, of course, is that Shakespeare had written long stretches of pure prose, which would doubtless have done a vast deal to advance the development of prose style.) Surprises pop up early, as in the printing of three Biblical translations—William Tyndale's, the Authorized Version, and the New English

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Bible—which provides reinforcement for the truism that there is no progress in art, for Tyndale's still seems the best. The 1549 "Solemnization of Matrimony" is also included; seeing it on the page is a reminder of its perfection as pure prose; having read it one really is prepared hereafter for ever to hold one's peace.

The comprehensiveness of the book is, as one would have expected from John Gross, impressive. The best check on comprehensiveness is to think of those less than obviously famous writers whose style one admires or finds amusing whom the editor may have forgotten or perhaps did not know. I could think of only four such exclusions, one highly obscure and one entitled to entry in the book only for an oblique reason: H. W. Fowler, the lexicographer; Sir Steven Runciman, the historian of the Crusades; Colonel John R. Stingo, the pseudonym of the columnist of the *Racing Form* much quoted by A. J. Liebling; and F. R. Leavis, whose generally wretched prose somehow did not stop him from making powerful arguments—a salutary sign, perhaps, of the limits of style itself.

Style, surely, must have been the chief criterion for entry into *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*, though, as its editor allows, so, too, was excerptability. Attempting to fit as many contributors into this volume as was feasible, John Gross looked, as he said, for "material which makes its impact quickly, and which can stand up by itself—the scene where it is immediately clear what is going on, the passage which doesn't call for further explanation." Some of his selections are as short as a paragraph, and a small number are only a sentence or two long.

Still, style reigns—prose as an art is what is on exhibition. That the writing of prose is a high art is not in dispute, yet what does one call a prose artist? It is a question that stumped even Max Beerbohm. The English language, sad to report, is in this particular inept in not providing a single word that is the parallel and equivalent of the word *poet*. Prosaist won't do, and neither will prosist, proser, the straightforward prose-writer, and, comically most pretentious of all, proseur. The problem inheres in the word prose, with its unsunderable connection to the word *prosaic*, which has itself always sounded like nothing so much as a lower-middle-class town in New Jersey. "Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted," wrote E. M. Forster in *Howards End*, "and human love will be seen at its height." But for certain people, among whom I count myself, the prose is the passion; and prose artfully written satisfies almost all the demands of poetry and quite a few not to be found in poetry at all.

"We are a numerous band," remarks the narrator of Henry James's story "The Next Time," "partakers of the same repose, who sit together in the shade of the tree, by the plash of the fountain, with the glare of the desert around and no great vice that I know of but the habit perhaps of estimating people a little too much by what they think of a certain style." Of course, there is no one certain style—only certain styles, manifold and multivarious styles. John Middleton Murry, who is in neither Arthur Quiller-Couch's nor John Gross's book, is good on this point, when, apropos of prose style, he writes: "There are styles, but no style; there are great styles and there are little ones: there are also non-styles. And, alas, no one can have a great style or a little one for the asking, nor even by taking pains . . . but the smallest writer can do something to assure that his individuality is not lost, by trying to make sure that he feels what he thinks he feels;—that he thinks what he thinks he thinks, that his words means what he thinks they mean."

Style, wrote Flaubert, who put the matter more succinctly, "c'est une manière de voir," a manner of seeing. As for the style for which he himself longed, the trophy for which this most famous of literary complainers engaged in his daily eight- or ten-hour wrestles with the language, Flaubert once described it for his mistress, Louise

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Colet, in a single sentence:

> I envision a style that would be beautiful, that someone will invent some day, ten years or ten centuries from now, one that would be rhythmic as verse, precise as the language of the sciences, undulant, deep-voiced as a cello, tipped with flame: a style that would pierce your ideas like a dagger, and on which your thought would sail ahead over a smooth surface, like a skiff before a good tail wind.

"Cut and print that," as they used to say at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. "It's a wrap."

Despite its wide range of styles, the history of English prose style has been a remarkably coherent one, with occasional radical deviations and no successful permanent revolutions whatsoever. Robert Burton (the not all that melancholy *Anatomy of Melancholy* man), Thomas Carlyle, James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, all played with prose style, altered it here and there, but none caused it to jump the track and head off in a fundamentally different direction. The formidable Gertrude Stein, whose program for prose—to make it like painting by putting it in the continuous present and by attempting to apply language to the page as if it were paint on the canvas—was the most radical attempt of all, succeeded in making only a few converts to this program, and today her prose exists chiefly as an historical curiosity.

Styles that had to have seemed odd, and to some immensely attractive, when they first arose, picked up imitators and altered the course of the Heraclitean river of English prose a bit, but those waters have flowed on, for the most part unchanged. "Some styles," wrote Middleton Murry, "will appear more peculiar than others, either because the writer's mode of feeling is unusually remote from the normal mode, or because the particular emotional experiences he is seeking to convey are outside the ordinary range of human experience, or, finally, because the writer, inspired by some impure motive, such as vanity or the desire to astonish the bourgeois, has deliberately made language outré and bizarre." At the same time, Middleton Murry adds: "The test of a true idiosyncrasy of style is that we should feel it to be necessary and inevitable; in it we should be able to catch an immediate reference back to a whole mode of feeling that is consistent with itself."

Changes have taken place. The periodic sentence, with its lovely interior architecture of subordinate clauses, is less common now than a century and more ago. (This is, preeminently, the style of Samuel Johnson, which Hazlitt compared to walking on stilts.) The passive voice, which has its uses, is thought to be bad form, and school teachers consider best avoided. Contractions, some fairly wild ones—"he'd've" shows up in a Bernard Malamud story—are no longer banned. Parallelism is used to less majestic effect than in Gibbon—it gave him his confident cadences—and other of the great prose artists of the eighteenth century. Reform has tended toward a general loosening up. If the formal and the literary were once the goal of ambitious stylists, today it is the informal and conversational toward which prose most commonly aims. The ornate has been on the decline, the plain style in the ascendant, though John Gross argues, persuasively, that this, far from happening overnight, has been in the works since late in the seventeenth century.

Yet the variety of prose possibilities remains vast. Consider, in recent English intellectual life, the distance between the short, well-aimed single-verb sentence-shots that were the stock in trade of A. J. P. Taylor and the Gatling gun loop-the-loop piling up of adjectives, subordinate clauses, and parentheses that is an Isaiah Berlin sentence at its most characteristic. (Both writers are represented in *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*.) Berlin, in a most uncharacteristically brief sentence, wrote, apropos of Winston Churchill: "A language is individual when its user is endowed with sharply marked characteristics and succeeds in creating a medium for their expression." English has never failed to allow for the

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latitude of individual difference. So long as there are different temperaments issuing in different ways of seeing the world new prose styles will continue to arise.

The boundaries between poetry and prose are themselves no longer so clear as once they were. Poetry is of course much older. "Prose was born yesterday," wrote Flaubert, "this is what we must tell ourselves. Poetry is pre-eminently the medium of past literatures. All the metrical combinations have been tried but nothing like this can be said of prose." Today the only formal distinction between poetry and prose is the former's use—now of course far from universal—of meter. (Prose, noted Aristotle in the *Rhetoric*, is devoid of meter; but not "destitute of rhythm.") Poetry was once thought, somehow, finer, more carefully crafted, than prose. But this had begun to break down as early as 1915, when Ezra Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe, then newly editor of *Poetry* magazine, that "Poetry must be as well written as prose," which suggests that, even then, it wasn't—at least not always. Much earlier, Wordsworth, dismissing poetic diction and ready to abandon meter, claimed that excellent poetry is indistinguishable from excellent prose.

The primary principle of prose composition remains variety. Rhythm, syntax, diction—all must be nicely varied to keep the reader on the *qui vive*. Not even punctuation may be permitted to lapse into the conventional or the entirely expected. "Details?" replied Max Beerbohm, when a copy editor suggested to him that punctuation was a mere matter of minor details. "No, these are not details to me. My choice of stops is as important to me—as important for the purpose of conveying easily to the reader my exact shade of meaning—as my choice of words." Anyone who has aspirations toward style in prose will concur. Everything—fonts, paper, even the space between words—counts.

"The best part of a writer's biography is not the record of his adventures," wrote Vladimir Nabokov, "but the story of his style." Can a psychological profile be built up on a writer through a careful scrutiny of his style? Does a writer's penchant for ironic utterance develop in him a dependency on the single dash—allowing him to comment upon, joke about, or even half-retract what has gone before? Does too frequent use of the word *indeed* suggest a tendency toward pomposity that ought to be fought off? Why does style show up in certain writers through flashing phrases and in others in the discrete sentence and in still others—I think here of Edmund Wilson—only at paragraph length? Why do some writers go in for ornate vocabulary and others (Somerset Maugham, for one) find it quite beyond them? Does too great a concern with prose style itself suggest—or even bring about—its own defects in character? Flaubert's mother, after all, told him that his mania for sentences had dried up his heart, and there is a good chance she may have been right. "Le style est l'homme même," wrote Buffon, and that highly intelligent fellow may not have known the half of it.

People who care a little too much about prose style are also subject to snobberies about it. What they fear above all is that style, though never insignificant, may just not be paramount—that really great writers, those capable of touching the profound, do not have need of style, or least not of much of it, the power of their stories and the largeness of their hearts being sufficient unto the day. The more potent the story the less it has need of great style to accompany the telling of it. Style expended on the subject of the Holocaust almost seems an affront; plain words—the plainest possible words—most straightforwardly set out are what is required.

Theodore Dreiser, who could write some extraordinarily awkward sentences, has, I think, suffered from the snobbery of style; and it is pleasing to see that John Gross, no snob, has found room in his book for brief and impressive selections from *Sister Carrie*, *The Financier*, and *An American Tragedy*.

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Attempts have also been made to diminish Dostoyevsky for his want of stylish prose. In our own time, Solzhenitsyn, too, has suffered similar darts and arrows of outraged snobbery.

For the rest of us, mere scribblers, style is not merely our best but our only chance to have our work survive. This is borne out by *The New Oxford Book of English Prose*, which is a compendium, a vade mecum, and finally a history of more than six hundred years of English prose style. If the book can be said to have a moral, as I believe it does, it is that style is the great preservative of literature. Without it, language itself is muttering in the rain, stuttering in the wind, mere babble, like the man said, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

Prosody atrocities

Timothy Steele All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing: An Explanation of Meter and Versification. Ohio University Press, 366 pages, $34.95 cloth $16.95 paper

reviewed by Robert Richman

One odd side effect of the growing interest in formal poetry over the last fifteen years is the continuing divergence of opinion regarding just what form is. In fact, there now seems to be as much if not more disagreement afoot (if you'll forgive the expression) than there was in the free-verse-dominated 1960s and 1970s. In this day of the iambic triumphant, we still see metrical philosophies ranging from the liberal (i.e., allowing so many substitutions in the line so as to distort the beat), to the conservative (i.e., limiting substitutions so readers never lose that iambic pulse). Paul Valéry's 1921 remark about the then-mushrooming free verse movement—"Our epoch has seen the birth of almost as many prosodies as it has counted poets"—could at century's end apply with equal force to the formal poets of today.

I am happy to report that Timothy Steele—from whose new book I took the quotation from Valéry—is among the more rigorous metrical theorists around. He is also among the most rigorous metrical practitioners: in addition to *Missing Measures: Modern Poetry and the Revolt against Meter* (1990), he has published four volumes of poems and edited a collection of J. V. Cunningham's poems. Steele argues that poets ought to limit themselves to a judicious deployment of the three time-honored variations of the iambic pentameter line: a trochee in the first foot, a trochee in the third foot, and a feminine ending.

A crash course for the metrically uninitiated: the substitution-free iambic pentameter line *the fossil bears the stamp of fin or leaf*—in which each of the five, two-syllable feet are made up of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one—with a first-foot trochaic substitution would read: *Fossils may bear the stamp of fin or leaf*. The same line with a third-foot trochee would read: *The fossil's world, dying and lost, now lives*. And with a feminine ending—i.e., the addition of an unstressed syllable at the end of the line—the line would read: *The fossil bears the stamp of face and body*.

Even limiting themselves to these three time-sanctioned substitutions, "skillful poets," Steele argues, "can flexibly handle, in regular iambic verse, pretty much any and all the verbal and syntactical resources of English." Steele considers all the other possibilities—an entire section, for instance, is devoted to an examination of "Loose Iambic—Iambic Verse with Anapestic Substitution." But generally speaking, Steele doesn't favor such innovations. One famous anapest-ridden poem Steele does like—Robert Frost's "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep"—works because the *abab* rhyme scheme lends the poem additional glue. (An anapestic foot consists of three syllables, with an accent only on the final syllable, as in the third foot of Frost's trimeter line from "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep": "They turn their back on the land.") The rhymes in Frost's

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poem, Steele says, "help us hear the line-endings distinctly." And this is crucial, given the unusual recurrence of the anapestic foot.

Another out-of-the-ordinary substitution Steele does not dislike is the first- and second-foot trochees in Louise Bogan's line from "Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral": "Eager quickly to free its sticky foot." One reason that this odd substitution works is because the rest of the fairly long poem consists primarily of iambic lines; another is that both trochee stresses are themselves powerful and clearly defined—something that is not always the case when large-scale metrical changes are rung.

One of the remarkable things about iambic verse, Steele points out, is its ability to accommodate the various levels of stress in spoken English. And indeed, one of his strengths as a critic is the emphasis he puts on this often misunderstood relationship between stress and meter. As Steele eloquently observes, "[i]n the mountain range of the line, one of the valleys may prove higher than one of the peaks." Serious readers and writers of iambic verse know that one of its neatest tricks is to have a syllable that is normally stressed in a line of prose or spoken English be unaccented, and to have a normally unaccented syllable be accented. In a line from a poem by Anne Finch, quoted in Steele's book—"Of heightened wit and of the critic's art"—the *of* that is unaccented in the first foot is accented in the third. In a line by Edward Thomas—"Their doubles and the shadow of my boat"—the usually light ***and*** is stressed. The best course, writes Steele, and it is a valuable piece of advice, "is to treat as an iamb any foot whose second syllable is heavier than the first." (Following the practice of the Danish philologist Otto Jespersen, Steele in one section marks lines with the numbers 1 through 4, with 1 identifying the lightest syllable and 4 the heaviest.) These mutations in stress in particular, Steele remarks, "indicate how incredibly complex metrical practice is in comparison to metrical description."

When Steele claims that the "possibilities for modulation in iambic pentameter are infinite," it is this maneuvering of stress that he principally has in mind. The ease with which our syllables change their metrical value—despite a recalcitrant few, of course, such as *-ing* and *-y* (types of syllables Steele oddly enough doesn't discuss in any depth)—distinguishes our language, for instance, from ancient Greek and Latin. In the "qualitative measures" of ancient versification, Steele notes—and this is also true of modern French and Italian—"metrical identities are less susceptible to manipulation."

Given the almost perfect match between the iambic pentameter line in particular and our accentual language, it seems wrong to disavow rules that, far from fencing in the writer, actually permit much in the way of technical solution and aesthetic discovery. But then those who write exclusively in free verse would not know this. As the Australian poet-critic James McAuley wrote in *Versification: A Short Introduction* (1966)—an observation that Steele includes in his notes—alternate modes of versification "all have difficulties of their own, and all sacrifice something of the unique complexity or variability-within-strictness of the traditional norm."

For the beginning poet especially, Steele's book is full of good practical suggestions. "The pentameter line in particular seems capable of accommodating almost any syntactical arrangement, and the serious poet will avoid relying on the more common ones." Internal rhyme (i.e., a rhyme within a single line) "sound[s] too jingly," at least to Steele's ear; but "commonplace rhymes are not inevitably bad." (Steele's discussion of the history of rhyme is fascinating.) A common word followed by an uncommon one, Steele avers, is a good strategy; congruent monosyllabic and multisyllabic lines also make for "interesting counterpoints." "Complexity of technique," he writes, "is not invariably an advantage." But perhaps Steele's most important bit of advice is his quarrel with the belief, put forward by T. S.

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Eliot, that "meter is most vital when violated" Such a view may have been true when metrical awareness was, as Steele puts it, "internalized and intuitive," as it was in Eliot's time; but in our day, when free verse is what is internalized and intuitive, meter is most vital when *not* violated.

The only flaw in Steele's rewarding book is his reluctance to criticize the views of other contemporary studies on prosody. Steele only mentions in passing, for instance, Annie Finch's *The Ghost of Meter* (1993), Alfred Corn's *The Poem's Heartbeat: A Manual of Prosody* (1997), and David's Baker's essay anthology, *Meter in English: A Critical Engagement* (1996).[1] (Let us not confuse Annie Finch, the fine young American poet, with Anne Finch, the contemporary of Pope's whose line Steele quotes.) Steele commends in passing Corn's *Poem's Heartbeat*, but is Corn more permissive about meter because he has been writing free verse most of his life? I wonder. The positions of other critics need to be clarified, especially if any are passing off as formal verse what properly should be called free. In a note to chapter one, Steele does dispute two erroneous scansions by Paul Fussell in *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form* (scansions involving pyrrhics and spondees), but this is very nearly it for criticism, at least when it comes to the current corps of writers. Indeed, in the very next sentence of this same note, Steele hints that a more tolerant view of pyrrhics and spondees is also found in a piece in David Baker's anthology; if so, I would certainly like to hear more about it.

A pyrrhic foot consists of two unstressed syllables, and a spondee, two long ones. I agree with Steele that if the second syllable of either the pyrrhic or the spondee is the slightest bit heavier than the first, those feet should be considered iambic. And if the first syllable of either spondee or pyrrhic is the slightest bit heavier than the second, these feet should be regarded as trochees. True pyrrhics and spondees are rare, claims Steele. At one point in the book, he writes: "I do not wish to seem spondicidal or pyrrhicidal," but he is. In my view, this is another feather in his metrical cap.

This slight reluctance to criticize, however, is no reason not to read *All the Fun's in How You Say a Thing*. It is the first book on meter I can recall reading that prompted me to shake my head in agreement on almost every page. And apart from its judicious analysis and good counsel, Steele cites as examples some of the finest poetry I have ever seen in a study of this kind; Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Browning, Auden, Stevens, Edgar Bowers, Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht, and Dana Gioia are a few of the poets whose work he draws upon. The glossary is useful, too, and does not suffer in the least from Steele's drumming home further, in different terms, points made earlier.

For someone like me whose views on iambic verse have changed over the years, from the tolerant to the orthodox, it is hard to speak with much authority in these matters. Timothy Steele, however, does not appear to have changed his mind at all. Good thing, because he was right from the beginning.

1 See Daniel Kunitz's perceptive review of *Meter in English* in *The New Criterion* (September 1997).

Bunk & braggadocio

David Crane Lord Byron's Jackal. HarperCollins UK, 398 pages, £19.99

reviewed by Ben Downing

"Byron asked me to preserve the skull for him; but remembering that he had formerly used one as a drinking cup, I was determined that Shelley's should not be so profaned." This agreeably ghoulish detail of Shelley's cremation in July 1822 comes down to us by way of Edward John Trelawny (1792–1881), whose concern for the dignity of the poet's remains did not deter him from plucking out the famously

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flame-proof heart, and who parlayed his brief friendships with the two bards into one of the oddest, most unlikely careers in English literature.

Trelawny had penetrated the Pisan Circle just six months earlier. Swarthy, raffish, enigmatic, and brimming with piquant anecdotes of his own piracy, he seemed to the suggestible nomads the very incarnation of Byron's Corsair. After Shelley's death, Trelawny accompanied Byron to war-torn Greece, where the latter promptly expired as well. Byron's immense celebrity deprived Trelawny of the chance to burn him too, but by hustling to Missolonghi he did manage to paw over the corpse and marvel at Byron's "feet of a sylvan satyr," as Trelawny put it. He was, in short, a sort of undertaker to the later Romantics.

It seems almost too perfect that this climber of poets next ascended Parnassus. There Trelawny spent months in a cave, abetting the klephts and marrying the barely pubescent daughter of a local warlord named—what else?—Odysseus. Forced to give up his troglodyte habits after being shot by a deranged fellow Philhellene who modelled himself on Thomas Hope's anti-hero Anastasius, Trelawny returned to Britain but soon drifted to Florence. Here he enlisted Walter Savage Landor to help him write the first volume of his memoirs, *Adventures of a Younger Son*, wherein Trelawny swaggeringly recounted, inter alia, his stint as an Asian buccaneer and the death by shark attack of his original child-bride, Zela. Two further volumes followed, *Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron* and (midwifed by William Michael Rossetti) *Records of Shelley, Byron and the Author*, in which he sniped at Byron and sanctified Shelley. Lionized by the Victorians as the last relic of his mighty generation—a "rich-memoried veteran," in Sir Sidney Colvin's words—Trelawny lingered, like Landor, forever.

Thus ran the official version. One astonishing thing about Trelawny's story is that some of it is true; another is that, until recently, most were hoodwinked into believing *all* of it to be so. Only in 1977 did a biographer, William St. Clair, unravel Trelawny's elaborate web of bunk and braggadocio. As it turns out, at the time he claimed to have been friskily swashbuckling in the Orient, he was in fact being cuckolded in England and undergoing an ignominious divorce. Taking refuge from his misery in Byron's poems, he styled himself after them and set out in pursuit of their author; disenchanted with Byron's person, he transferred his adulation to Shelley. Much of what Trelawny wrote and said about the "irascible tribe of songsters," as he dubbed them, is broadly veracious yet suspect and shifting in its details. Was Byron's left foot clubbed, his right, or both? Was that a copy of Sophocles in the drowned Shelley's pocket, or rather one of Aeschylus? Over such fine points Trelawny dithered, endlessly respinning his yarns for each rapt Victorian listener.

David Crane's biography is commendable for its tart irony, crisp prose, and chilling accounts of the Greek War of Independence and the tragically quixotic Philhellene movement. His book is chiefly engrossing, however, as a Romantic case study not just of life imitating art, but of each chasing the other's tail until they blur into a Wildean knot. Trelawny first poses as a Corsair rogue then actually becomes one, only to run afoul of Anastasius. (That he never met Frankenstein is surprising.) In his memoirs he bites the Byronic hand that penned him, meanwhile stoking the embers of Shelley's pyre into a cultish blaze over which he apostolically presides and lovingly simmers his own fame; in the ultimate groupie coup, he even gets himself buried next to Shelley in Rome. Trelawny belongs to a venerable line of frauds, liars, and scoundrels that includes Richard Savage, George Psalmanazar, Baron Corvo, and Edmund Backhouse (whose middle name was Trelawny—a tantalizing coincidence). Finally, though, he is a singular invention, his own patchwork monstrosity.

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Book notes

David Fromkin The Way of the World: From the Dawn of Civilizations to the Eve of the Twenty-first Century. Knopf, 253 pages, $25

Here, in a brisk but never breathless telling, is the story of man—how he came to be, how he made the world, and how he has remade it to suit his changing self, over and over again. It's the story of who we are, where we have been, and, in its concluding, speculative chapters, where we may be going. The teller is David Fromkin, a professor of international relations, history, and law at Boston University, and a sometimes contributor to these pages. He's an optimist, a believer in progress, an unashamed champion of Western ideals. He's sane. He's trustworthy. He's eminently intelligible. He applies his broad brush with measured, confident, upward-leading strokes. He is, in short, a refreshing, even necessary, antidote to all those fevered end-time fantasists whose only plausible scenario for man is to send him, banging and whimpering and unredeemed, over the edge and into the abyss.

Fromkin organizes his universal history into eight chapters, each documenting one of the "giant steps" we took on the long road to the present. Four steps were taken in the deepest human past: we evolved into *homo sapiens*, developing the "traits of mind, heart, and body" that separated us from our hominid ancestors; we discovered agriculture, domesticated animals, and built the first cities; we developed a conscience, instituting law, religion, and philosophy; we created great empires, especially in Europe. Four further steps were taken in our own millennium: Europe "achieved rationality," developed its "distinctive mentality," and revolutionized science, technology, and industry. Two, Europe discovered the world, and conquered it with culture. Three, beginning in the eighteenth century, science, technology, and industry made marvelous leaps forward and we of the West became moderns. Finally, led by its freshest invention, the United States of America, the West moved steadily toward democratic government, decolonization, and world law.

"Ancient history," writes Fromkin, "is the story of how the human race experimented, invented civilizations, and then created more and more of them. Modern history is a tale of elimination rounds, with the number of civilizations contracting until only one"—Western, or American, civilization—"remained." The story of the near future—the subject of Fromkin's final four chapters—will be that of mankind's stuggle "to adapt to the requirements . . . and cope with the consequences of the functioning . . . of the sole surviving civilization."

Is the glue that binds this global civilization together strong enough to hold? And now that the Americans have remade the world in their own image, will "the ideas and the principles the United States has championed survive the strains and challenges of reality"? Yes, Fromkin smiles, "the world is in luck." The United States desires permanent peace; its ways of insuring peace are swift, effective, and just; and "continuing American leadership, like it or not, seems to be what the world has got." The smile is triumphant, but it's not completely untroubled; it's the smile of Noah, the world his ark. "We're all in the same boat," Fromkin writes. "It may be a seaworthy boat; but it would be less worrisome if there were more than one."

Isabel Bolton Under Gemini. Steerforth Press, 133 pages, $12 paper

When she was in her early sixties, Mary Britton Miller (1883–1975), who after twenty years of publishing had found no success as a lyric poet, reinvented herself as Isabel Bolton, a writer of lyric prose. The first book under her pen name was *Do I Wake or Sleep* (1946), a perfect fable of America and Europe on the eve of World War II and a witty, stinging satire of New York's moneyed class. Edmund Wilson, who seldom gushed, was lavish in his praise: "She has

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cut to roundness and smoothed to convexity a little crystal of literary form that concentrates the light like a burning glass." Miller followed this triumph with three more novels, each a miracle of concision, and a handful of striking short stories—a small, distinctive, and sadly overlooked body of fiction that, in her lifetime, earned her deserved comparisons with James and Wharton, Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen. She also wrote a remarkable memoir, *Under Gemini*, published in 1966 and now, after three decades, plucked from obscurity by the venturesome Steerforth Press.

Of Mary Miller's many acknowledged masters, Bowen is the presiding influence here. As Diana Trilling once noted, Bowen and Miller share "the same scalpel-like precision of observation and expression, the same ability to make the most delicate differentiations between appearances and reality, the same fierce insight into human error held in check by warm human sympathy." Both are also modern masters of what Bowen once called "Life with the Lid On," that kind of fiction in which terribly well-bred ladies and gentlemen, every whalebone and stud in place, suppress passion, terror, and doubt as they take up their fish forks and smile past their host. And, most relevant to *Under Gemini*, Bowen and Miller are unrivaled as creators of child protagonists, characters who are never miniature adults but who, in the purity of their emotions and their imperfect understanding of the workings of the world, are at once real children and criticisms of the adults who share the stage with them—their parents, their protectors, and especially their exploiters.

The protagonist of *Under Gemini* is Mary Miller herself, who writes of her Brahmin-bohemian girlhood at the end of the last century, a girlhood marked by privilege, disorder, longing, and loss. Her parents are glimpsed; we hear the word "cholera"; the parents disappear. We meet the good grandmother, and run wild on her seemingly boundless estate; then we meet Julia, the quick-to-anger aunt who too soon takes her place. Best of all, we come to know Miss Rogers, the loving but crisis-prone governess, a "sad and hungry heart" who strives in vain to be the perfect mother to the five ungovernable Miller children. We are led through the seasons of New England, through blizzards and weddings and fourteen seaside summers, to the defining moment of Mary's life—the afternoon in August when, in one shocking instant, her childhood abruptly ends.

The power of this book—and it is truly, strangely powerful—lies not in its set pieces, not even in its moral counterpoint of the child and the adult worlds, but in its unique narrative voice. *Under Gemini* is written not in the first-person singular, the "I" of every other memoir, but rather in the plural, "we," for Mary was born not just Mary but, wondrously, Mary and Grace—one mind in two bodies, her own and her identical twin's. Mary Miller evokes not only the universal aspects of her New England childhood—beach days, snow days, school days—but also one of the most exotic of human experiences, that of being accompanied through life by a second self, and of knowing oneself to *be* that other person, down to the last nerve. "I look at Grace and know that I am crying too," she writes; "Tears stream down our faces." "A thought that we had never had before struck us suddenly." "I kept shouting but it was not my voice I heard. It was hers."

As a novelist, Isabel Bolton took as her motto a line from Keats's letters: "Life is a valley of soul-making." In her own case—in her and Grace's case—the making of a soul was a joint, not a single, venture. *Under Gemini* is an exquisite book, beautiful in its form and haunting in its effects. It is also, at little over one hundred pages, proof of the argument that, in matters of art, the miniature need never be mistaken for the minor.

Michael Allin Zarafa.
Walker & Company, 215 pages, $22

Stately, elegant, wholly benign, all neck and spots and huge brown eyes, the giraffe

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strides silently through our consciousness from earliest childhood on. Any five-year-old master of any Western tongue will instruct you that *G* is for *giraffe*. Moreover, one assumes that it has always been just so, and that Leonardo, Shakespeare, and Napoleon also learned their *G*'s on the animal. The first surprise of Michael Allin's continuously surprising book is that Western knowledge of the giraffe dates only from 1826, when the first live specimen seen in modern Europe disembarked at Marseilles, a strange and delightful consequence of the Turkish stranglehold on Greece.

The giraffe, you see, was a gift to Charles X from Muhammad Ali, the Ottoman viceroy of Egypt. The cunning Muhammad, fully aware that French popular sentiment was against him and his allied Turks, was hoping to charm Charles out of going to war alongside the Greeks. The viceroy lost his gamble. The giraffe, meanwhile, conquered the hearts of a people.

In a tour de force of historical re-creation, Mr. Allin tells the story of this wonder from another world, whose presence among the French both amazed and transformed them. She crossed the Mediterranean, a charismatic, twelve-foot-high three-year-old, in a custom-built boat with a hole in the deck to allow her to stand upright below. She was accompanied by exotic Arab handlers and by three dairy cows, for she drank only Egyptian milk. The keeper of the royal menagerie, who met her boat at Marseilles, persuaded himself that the best way to transport her to Paris was on foot. And so began a 550-mile trek, spanning forty-one cloudless early-summer days, up the Rhône Valley then west to the Seine, and on to the palace at Saint-Cloud. Along the way, villages renamed streets and squares to commemorate the giraffe's passage, while in Paris she was all the rage even before her arrival. By the summer of 1827, everything was *á la Girafe*: wallpaper, textiles, crockery, soap, and cookies—anything that could be was stamped with or made in her image.

Giraffe derives from the Arabic word *zarafa*, which means "charming" or "lovely one." Mr. Allin, beguiled by the fairy-tale notion of "this beautiful stranger in King Charles' court," began his little book as a work of fiction. "I named the giraffe Zarafa," he writes, "and imagined her wading in a field of sunflowers. But as I learned more about [her reception] in Paris . . . and as the humans involved in [her] journey emerged in my research as real-life figures, the fairy tale kept backing up into ever more fascinating history." Luckily, despite all his side trips into politics, Egyptology, and a hundred other inviting corners, Mr. Allin never lost sight of his original inspiration, the storybook image of thousands of curious Frenchman leaving their fields and homes to marvel at "this living mythological combination of creatures—a gentle and mysterious sort of horned camel . . . with legs as tall as a man and the cloven hooves of a cow, markings like a leopard or a maze of lightning, and that startling blue-black snake of a twenty-inch tongue."

—*Christopher Carduff*

Editor's note: We wish to call our readers' attention to the publication of *The Primate's Dream: Literature, Race, and Ethnicity in America* by James W. Tuttleton (Ivan R. Dee, $27.50). Portions of the volume first appeared in *The New Criterion*.

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Notebook

Repeating the old lies

by Jeffrey Meyers

As a biographer, I'm often more puzzled than enlightened by personal interviews. Establishing the facts is tricky enough, and the truth can be elusive. The people I talk to may be old, in frail health, or have failing memories. They sometimes "remember" what's been written or said instead of what actually happened, or say what they think I want to hear. They may even lie to make themselves look better. Recently, I came across a new difficulty in literary biography: ideological blindness.

I went to England last November to do research for a life of George Orwell. I had the names of two men, Frank Frankford and Sam Lesser, who'd fought against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Frankford, who'd been in the Anarchist POUM (United Marxist Workers Party) militia with Orwell, and who was now aged eighty-five, had agreed to see me; but I didn't know anything about Lesser, or if he was still alive. After talking to them I realized that the two men, fighting on different fronts, Barcelona and Madrid, had in fact been intimately connected. Lesser had changed the life of Frankford, and Frankford had been searching for him for the last sixty years.

I knew that Frankford had played a notorious role in Orwell's life. In 1937 Frankford was arrested in Barcelona for trying to sell paintings stolen from museums or looted from churches. After his release from jail with the help of an English intermediary, the British *Daily Worker* of September 14, 1937 published a story about him. In the article, Frankford accused POUM, and especially its commander, Georges Kopp, of secretly helping the Fascists on the Aragon front in northeast Spain and of deliberately rebelling against their Communist allies in Barcelona.

To validate the story *The Daily Worker* claimed that it had first appeared in the Spanish press, and then quoted Frankford's detailed accusations: "Every night at 11 P.M. the sentries heard the rattle of a cart, and we could tell from its light that it was crossing the space between the positions on our left and the Fascist lines. We were ordered never to shoot at this light. . . . Near Huesca . . . one night we saw Commander Kopp returning from the Fascist lines." Two days later, to lend authenticity to the story, *The Daily Worker* printed Frankford's corrections. He now said he wasn't so sure: "he was not *certain* that the carts crossed the line, nor had he *himself* actually seen Kopp returning from the Fascist lines."

Frankford's false statement that POUM had collaborated with the Fascist forces in Aragon was repeated in a vicious book by Georges Soria, *Trotskyism in the Service of Franco: Facts and Documents on the Activities of the* P.O.U.M., which was brought out in London in 1938 by the Communist publishers Lawrence and Wishart. This book was used to justify the Communist extermination of their former POUM allies in Barcelona. Frankford's condemnation did

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great harm to former comrades, like Kopp, who was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured, and Orwell, who was hunted down and threatened with execution. In *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), Orwell described these events from personal experience, and made Kopp the hero of his book.

Frankford's accusations were forcefully refuted by Orwell's article in the British *New Leader* of September 24, which was signed by fourteen members of the British contingent. He concluded: "it is quite obvious that all these wild statements . . . were put into Frankford's mouth by the Barcelona journalists, and that he chose to save his skin by assenting to them, because at that time it was extremely dangerous to be known to have any connection with the P.O.U.M." The left-wing politician Fenner Brockway later verified this statement. In his autobiography, *Inside the Left* (1942), Brockway wrote that when "the boy" (Frankford was actually twenty-four) returned to London he came to the office of the Independent Labour Party, which was affiliated with POUM, and spoke to John McNair, who had escaped from Barcelona with Orwell: "He broke down crying and begged forgiveness. He had been imprisoned in Barcelona, and had been presented with the document to sign as a condition of freedom."

But forty-two years later, in December 1979, Frankford repeated his accusations to Orwell's biographer. Bernard Crick wrote:

> Frankford denies that he ever broke down or asked forgiveness; says that he never signed anything, but simply gave an interview to Sam Lessor [sic] of *The Daily Worker* which he embellished, and he sticks to his story that there was fraternisation and crossing of the lines on occasion (which seems plausible), but he is "not sure" whether he ever thought that guns rather than fruit and vegetables ever figured in such movements, though "there are things to be explained." (When I asked him if he was not angry at *The Daily Worker* for putting words into his mouth, Mr. Frankford replied: "Quite legitimate in politics, I am a realist.")

Four years later, when closely questioned in an Arena television program of December 1983, Frankford squirmed uneasily and forced out a fake smile. He now denied that he'd ever made the accusations and insisted: "I don't remember that . . . I don't think I ever said that . . . that wasn't true and I wouldn't have said that." When asked about the propriety of publishing such stories, he replied with surprising cynicism: "Certain tactics are legitimate when you are fighting a battle like this." Not at all horrified that such statements could be attributed to him, he said, "it rather amuses me."

On a long shot, before seeing Frankford, I called Lesser's old phone number. Now eighty-three, he answered in a gruff, aggressive voice. When I mentioned my book on Orwell, he became extremely hostile and asked: "What the hell are you ringing me for?" I said I understood that he'd been in the Spanish War. He exclaimed that he was a Communist who'd fought and was wounded with the International Brigade, and was violently antagonistic to both Orwell and POUM.

As I questioned him about his background, he first vented his anger, then calmed down and became more friendly. He'd spent his whole professional life as a journalist on *The Daily Worker*. Since his brother was also on the paper, he'd reversed the letters of his last name and used the byline "Sam Russell." When I said that his brother must have been the greater Lesser and he the lesser Lesser, he laughed and it broke the ice.

Still repeating the old lies—which he may have believed after a lifetime of professional lying—Lesser claimed that POUM had started the revolution in Barcelona behind the front and stabbed the Communists in the back. He also maintained that members of POUM had driven around Barcelona in the ambulances so desperately needed at the front. POUM, he said, had plenty of medical supplies when the International Brigade had nothing at all. When he was wounded he had to be evacuated by ox-cart. I listened

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patiently to these angry assertions, hearing the bitterness of past years, and didn't try to refute them.

Despite all his contradictory interviews, ranging over sixty years, Frankford was still eager to talk again when I turned up in 1998. I realized that I was dealing with a deaf and probably muddled old man. I had made the appointment over the phone with his wife, but he then called back to get my address so he could send me directions to his house in Wells, Somerset. The directions never reached me (the house *was* hard to find) because he couldn't hear me on the phone. I arrived late and hungry. Mrs. Frankford gave me a sandwich, and poured me a glass of Spanish wine. So I struggled to eat, drink, ask questions, take notes, look at the documents he offered me and copy whatever I could—all at the same time.

Though apparently robust, the stocky, white-haired Frankford had trouble hearing my questions and his memories were clearly embellished. After discussing his background and explaining why he went to Spain, he claimed (like most other British volunteers on the Aragon front) that *he* was the one standing next to Orwell when he was shot through the throat and caught him when he fell. Frankford maintained that just before he was shot Orwell "was telling us of his experiences working in a Paris brothel"—unlikely, since he had worked in a restaurant.

Frankford readily admitted that he disliked Orwell because of "his attack on the English working class" in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), which he had read in Spain. Orwell had been a policeman in Burma and assumed leadership of the British contingent. Frankford resented this, as well as Orwell's belief that "everything he did was right." He was also annoyed that Stafford Cottman (another British member of POUM), rather than himself, had been invited to Spain for the Arena television program. He didn't seem to realize that his role in events in Barcelona precluded an invitation.

Frankford then described his arrest, along with his mate "Tankie," who'd served in the Tank Corps in World War I. The Spanish police saw Frankford reading an English book, suspected him of being a spy and stopped him for questioning. They found the looted items, arrested him and put him in prison. An Englishman, Sam Lesser, got him out of jail and advised him to leave Spain as soon as possible. But he didn't know if Lesser had published *The Daily Worker* story and didn't know where Lesser was—though he'd been trying to find him for a long time. When I said I had just spoken to Lesser and had his address and phone number, Frankford was astonished.

We then got down to the sticky question. Though Frankford was still a Communist, he now conceded that "POUM was all right" and had been "badly treated during the political maneuvering and struggle for power." Apparently contrite and eager to clear his name, though stumbling for words, he showed me a xeroxed page from Brockway's book and admitted that he had indeed broken down and begged for forgiveness in London. *The Daily Worker* "twisted and changed the meaning of what I said," he exclaimed. Pathetically, and rather touchingly, he pleaded: "Don't blame me for anything. I never meant those things to be put down that way!" I asked, for the record, if the accusations he'd made in 1937 were true or false. "Just say, 'yes' or 'no,'" I said. Vague, evasive, yet eager to please, he thought for a long time. Finally, he said he wasn't sure.

I went back to London and called Lesser again. Friendlier this time, but more wary, he said that after being invalided out of the International Brigade he became a Communist Party representative, head of English-language broadcasting (i.e. propaganda) and *The Daily Worker*'s correspondent in Barcelona. When I mentioned Frankford's name, Lesser said he might have known him in Hackney (a working-class district in London's East End) before they went to Spain. But he could not recall getting

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Frankford out of prison and said he would surely have remembered that good deed if he had done so. When I mentioned *The Daily Worker* story, he asked: "Was it signed?" When I said it wasn't, he claimed to have no recollection of writing it. Then he added: "Maybe it was true."

What then, *is* the truth? Frankford said Lesser got him out of prison and he was certainly in a position to do so. Frankford's arrest gave the Communists an opportunity to smear the POUM and helped justify their extermination. Lesser, Barcelona correspondent of *The Daily Worker*, must have written that lying story. He was, it seems, both Frankford's benefactor and betrayer.

Frankford's accusations, refuted by Orwell, were certainly false. Brockway's account of Frankford's remorse (witnessed by McNair) is convincing. Why then did Frankford "stick to his story" and repeat his lies to Crick, yet retract essential parts of his statement—as he did long ago in Spain—and claim to be a cynical realist when he was really a disillusioned fantasist? Was it stubbornness, pride, bravado, or bitterness?

His uneasy recantation on television, reinforced by his guilt-ridden pleas when I interviewed him, seemed inspired by bad conscience. Was he a victim, manipulated and humiliated by the Communists he still believed in, or a Communist agent, planted in POUM to discredit the militia? My interviews with Frankford and Lesser reveal that the political battle lines of the 1930s have endured into the 1990s. Hard-liners still believe it's ethical to lie in the service of Communism—even when the system has withered and supporters like Frankford have begun to crack. They continue to repeat what Orwell in 1940 called "the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls."

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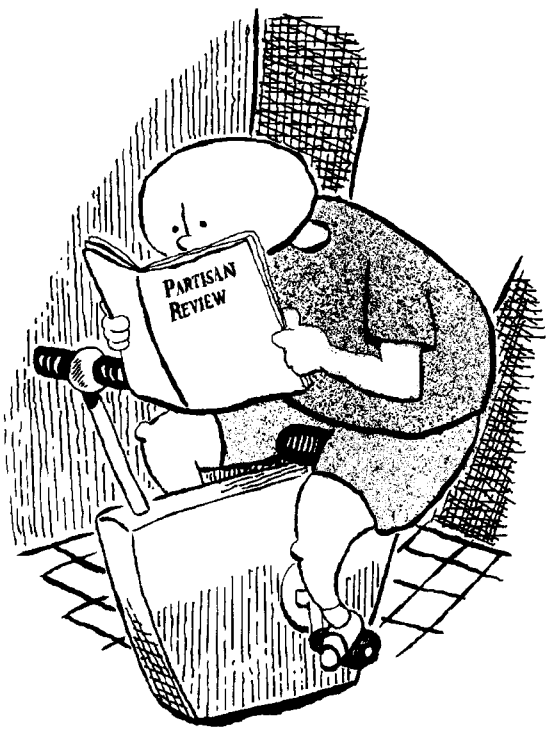

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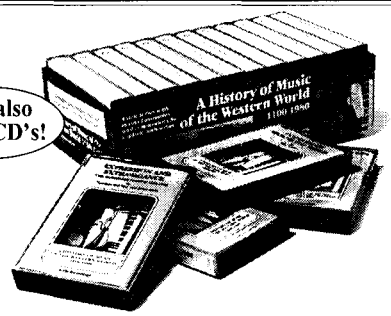

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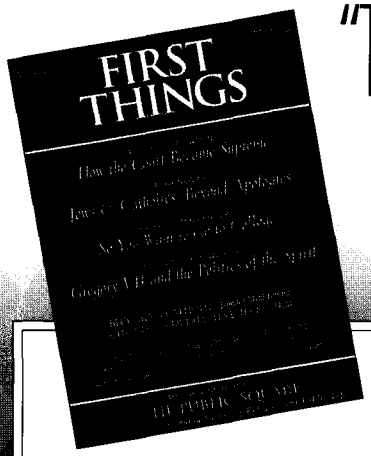

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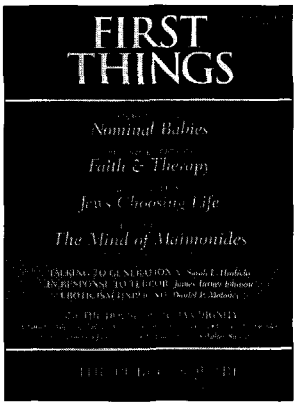

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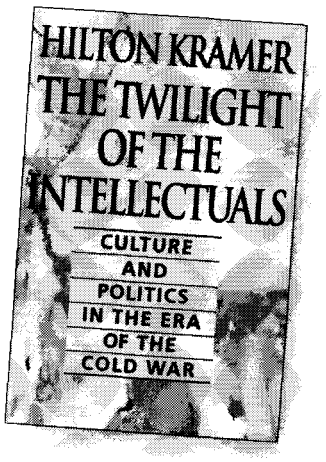

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Complete guidelines: The winning poet will receive $1,000 and have his or her work published in the October/November 1999 issue of *Boston Review*. Submit up to five unpublished poems, no more than 10 pages total. A $15 entry fee, payable to *Boston Review* in the form of a check or money order, must accompany all submissions, which must be postmarked no later than June 1, 1999. All entrants will receive a one-year subscription beginning with the October/ November 1999 issue. Simultaneous submissions are allowed if the *Review* is notified of acceptance elsewhere. Manuscripts must be submitted in duplicate, with a cover note listing the author's name, address, and phone number; names should not be on the poems themselves. Submissions will not be returned. Winner will be announced no later than October 1, 1999 on the *Review*'s Web site, http://bostonreview.mit.edu. Send submissions to: Poetry Contest, *Boston Review*, E53-407 MIT, Cambridge MA 02139.

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